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CARMEN SYLVA
AND
SKETCHES FROM THE ORIENT



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TORONTO



Carmen Sylva

CARMEN SYLVA
AND
SKETCHES FROM THE ORIENT

BY
PIERRE LOTI
MEMBER OF THE FRENCH ACADEMY

AUTHORIZED TRANSLATION
BY
FRED ROTHWELL

New York
THE MACMILLAN COMPANY
1912

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Set up and electrotyped. Published November, 1912.

Norwood Press
J. S. Cushing Co. — Berwick & Smith Co.
Norwood, Mass., U.S.A.

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CARMEN SYLVA

CARMEN SYLVA

NOVEMBER, 1887.



URING my wanderings, I once chanced to spend a few days with a fairy, in an enchanted castle.

The distant sound of a horn in the forest depths invariably brings back to my mind the most trivial incidents of this visit.

The reason was that the fairy's castle lay in the very heart of a densely wooded forest in which the distant blasts of martial trumpets were constantly heard resounding on every side. There was a strange, weird melancholy of its own about the sound, resembling some magic call, in the vibrant air we breathed, — the silent, pure, invigorating air of the mountain peaks. . . .

For me, music has a power of evocation that is absolute; fragments of melodies heard years

ago remind me, far better than any visual image would do, of certain spots I have seen, certain persons who have come into my life.

And so whenever I hear a distant clarion call, there arises before my mind, as distinctly as though I were actually present, a royal boudoir (for the fairy of whom I speak is a queen as well) whose lofty Gothic windows overlook an endless stretch of green firs, thickly clustered together as in a primeval forest. The boudoir, stored with a profusion of valuable objects, possesses a rather gloomy kind of splendour, the colour of these objects being indefinable: faint crimson turning a tawny hue, and darkened gold tints assuming the look of smouldering embers; there are galleries resembling small inner balconies, large heavy hangings that conceal recesses full of mystery. . . . And there the fairy reappears before me, dressed all in white and wearing a long veil; she is seated in front of an easel, painting on parchment — Byzantine fashion — with light, easy touch, the most wonderful archaic illuminations, in which gold is the predominant colour: work antique

which she had begun three years previously, a priceless missal, intended for a cathedral.

The fairy's white robe is Oriental in form, woven and worked in silver thread. But the face, emerging from out the veil's transparent folds, bears that inexpressibly gentle though somewhat sad expression which belongs to none but the most refined Northern races. And yet the general effect is so harmonious that one would think the dress had been invented for the fairy who wears it, and for no one else, — the fairy who somewhere said: "Dress is not a matter of indifference. It makes of you a living work of art, the sole condition being that you adorn that which adorns you."

How shall we describe the features of this queen? This is a delicate, a difficult task, for the ordinary expressions one would use are immediately rejected as irreverent, so instinct with respect is the feeling she arouses within the soul. The light of eternal youth is in her smile, on her velvet-pink cheeks, shining and dancing in the laughter of her beauteous lips. Her magnificent tresses, however, visible through the

silver-spangled veil, are almost white! . . .
“White locks,” she wrote in her *Thoughts*, “are the foam-topped waves which ride upon the sea after a storm.”

And what words could express the unrivalled charm of her glance, of those clear grey eyes, somewhat overshadowed by the broad open forehead: the charm of a lofty intelligence, a discreet, sympathetic power of penetration, habitual suffering, and a wide-embracing pity? The countenance almost continually changes its expression, although the smile can scarcely ever be said to be absent. “It is part of our *rôle*,” she once said to me, “to be constantly smiling . . . like idols.” But there are many differences, many varieties of this queenly smile: suddenly it appears as frank, almost childish, gaiety; often it is a smile of mingled resignation and melancholy, — at times, even, of infinite sadness.

With one of the many sorrows that have turned white the hair of this sovereign I am acquainted, — can I not understand it better than another? — and I will tell it. In the

centre of a large garden adjoining the royal residence stood the tomb of a little princess, who had inherited the features and the beautiful broad forehead of the queen by whose orders I was conducted to the spot.

On the tombstone was inscribed the following sentence: "Weep not; she is not dead, but sleepeth." And indeed, the small recumbent statue did seem to be peacefully sleeping in its marble robe.

"Weep not." Nevertheless, the mother of the little sleeping damsel still bitterly mourns her only child. A phrase she often used comes back to my mind, as though some voice within myself were repeating it in slow, funereal accents: "A home without a child is like a bell without a tongue: the sound slumbering within might be very musical, could it only be aroused to life."

How distinctly I remember every moment of those exquisite conversations with that white-robed queen, as we sat in the sombre boudoir. At the beginning of these notes, I spoke of a fairy: that was my way of referring to a being

of superior essence. I could not use the word angel, which, through misuse, has become antiquated and ridiculous. Moreover, the word fairy, interpreted as I understand it, seems to me quite applicable to this woman — youthful in spite of her grey locks; smiling through a mist of tears; a daughter of the North and yet a queen of the Orient; speaking many languages and transforming each into perfect music; ever fascinating, possessing the gift of creating around her — sometimes merely by the aid of a genial smile — a kind of beneficent charm, of the most reassuring and consoling nature.

Thus do I call back to mind the queen with her flowing veil (no longer dare I speak of the fairy, now that I have defined her more openly). She is speaking to me as she sits before her easel, whilst archaic drawings, which seem the natural offspring of her fingers, succeed one another on the parchment of the missal. By the side of Her Majesty sit two or three young ladies, her maids of honour, — dark-complexioned girls wearing strange-coloured gold-spangled Oriental costumes; they are engaged either in reading,

or in embroidering on silk large, old-fashioned flowers. They raise their eyes from time to time, whenever the conversation appears to interest them more particularly. The place Her Majesty generally appoints for me is in front of herself, near a large single-paned window, which offers the illusion of opening out upon the surrounding forest. With true artistic feeling, the king had allowed the forest to approach within twenty paces of the walls; the result being that the windows of the royal apartments look upon nothing but gigantic firs and undergrowth, — or wide-spreading verdant stretches, the sylvan peaks of the Carpathians rising tier upon tier in the limpid atmosphere. And the forest, which you feel to be close at hand, creates an impression of enchantment, of mystery, within the magnificent castle. . . .

Whole sentences, spoken by the queen in sweet, musical tones, come back to my mind. I replied almost in whispered accents, for the quiet, meditative atmosphere of a church seemed

present in this boudoir. I remember, too, those occasional silences after some profound utterance whose meaning seemed to gain in intensity by reason of the prevailing calm. It was then, during these intervals of silence, that I heard — as though coming from the distant confines of the forest — those unknown, military sounds resembling that of a horn. It was autumn, and I even remember the following insignificant detail: the last few moths and flies that had heedlessly flown into this sumptuous tomb to die dashed their poor wings against the large, transparent glass window by my side.

As I have said, the queen's voice was pure music, — music as delightful and fresh as it was instinct with youth! I do not think I ever heard the sound of a voice that could compare with hers, that I ever listened to any one reading with like charm. On the morrow of my arrival, Her Majesty had expressed curiosity as to what I thought of a certain German poem, unknown to me. In the course of a private conversation, her secretary put me on my guard: "If the queen reads it to you herself,"

he said, "you will be unable to judge; no matter what the queen reads, it always appears delightful, — like the songs she sings, — but if you take up the book afterwards, to read alone, it is not at all the same thing and you are often completely disillusioned."

Subsequently I discovered how true this warning was; being privileged to listen whilst Her Majesty was reading to the ladies of the Court, certain chapters from a book of mine, I actually failed to recognise my own work, so embellished and transfigured did it appear.

Of the whole castle, appearing in the midst of that forest, like an artist's dream which the touch of a magic wand had made real, my memory retains nothing so distinctly as this boudoir. Already there is something vague and indistinct in what I can recall of those long galleries with their heavy hangings and ancient panoplies; those stairs up and down which passed maids of honour, ushers, or lackeys; those *Renaissance* rooms which made one think of an inhabited Louvre, a Louvre in times of

royalty; that music room, so conducive to reverie, lofty and dim, with its wonderful stained windows, and containing the great organ which the queen played in the evenings . . . whereas I immediately recall without the slightest difficulty the room in which Her Majesty was at times so gracious as to receive me, when she was engaged in painting or some other occupation. After being permitted to pass those double doors, it seemed as though one had entered some serene abode from which so many persons and interests are shut out. It is there I always prefer to think of this queen, whose guest I was. When she walked across the boudoir, her white costume contrasted strikingly with the dark background formed by the door hangings or the rare woodwork sketches made by armies of sculptors. When she was seated working, from the place she had assigned to me the first day and which I was wont to take afterwards, I saw her face and veil appear prominent in front of that great, that superb painting of Delacroix, *La Mise au tombeau du Christ*. And invariably, on either side of her,

sat the young ladies in Oriental costumes, completing a picture I would gladly have transferred to canvas, had I been able. From time to time these little maids of honour, all so different in aspect and features, changed and took each other's place. When one had left the room, another was seen at the entrance door, raising the hangings with their large, heavy folds. After the usual ceremonial courtesy, she advanced, and kissed the queen's hand, — sometimes sitting on the ground at her feet and leaning her head on the queen's knees, in a caressing, though respectful, attitude. Then the queen would explain, with a plaintive, motherly smile, that she regarded them as her own "daughters." To my mind, what constituted the one attraction of this smile, more than aught else, was its excessive kindness and benevolence.

How well, too, do I remember these young ladies, who every morning shook hands with me so simply and gracefully, with such an air of friendliness! On reaching the Court, I had been surprised to hear them all, in spite of their

Oriental costumes, speaking in the most elegant French and with the purest accent, on all kinds of novel and intelligent topics, like *Parisiennes* of the best society — perhaps even better than *Parisiennes* of their own age, with more real learning, and less conventionality and frivolity. One felt that the queen had moulded to her own liking this nursery of the Roumanian aristocracy, amongst whom French is the language usually spoken.

The first time I had the honour of conversing with Her Majesty, I was not greatly astonished at hearing her speak in a superior fashion of superior things, for I knew this would be the case. But, in her position as a queen, as one who had to wear the “constant smile of an idol,” I imagined she must have been ignorant of certain of the deepest troubles and sorrows of the human soul. Great was my astonishment, however, to find that she was well acquainted with the woes and miseries of the humblest as well as of the greatest. For the queen to be of this nature, a sad and austere childhood in a

castle away in the North was needed ; a childhood purposely kept away from Court life, and brought into continual contact with the poor on her father's estate. To make her so kind-hearted and accessible to all who suffer, her early education must have been a simple, family one, doubtless such as her mother, the princess of Wied, and her aunt, the Queen of Sweden, had received. Then followed a kind of pilgrimage through Europe, to London, Paris, the Courts of Berlin and Saint Petersburg, in the company of her aunt, the grand duchess Hélène of Russia. And in the countries she visited, the greatest masters stored her mind with a transcendent *résumé*, as it were, of human knowledge, with the quintessence of the world's literature. Then followed the long series of years on the throne of Roumania. . . . She was still quite young when she came to this unsettled land, and must have gazed with astonishment on many a drama. The lonely and the widowed, childless mothers and motherless girls, instantly became her friends. She regarded it as the duty of a queen never to turn

a deaf ear to affliction and sorrow, however heartrending, — it was her *rôle* to comfort and reconcile, to pardon and obliterate. . . . Her adopted “daughters,” brought up by her side in the palace, were always chosen preferably from amongst families afflicted with some mysterious misfortune or bereavement, and those who tearfully left her, when entering upon married life, seem to have retained in their hearts feelings of profound reverence and affection for the queen.

Boundless, unrestricted pity, all-pardoning and all-embracing, expecting nothing in return, such, to my mind, is the rare, the somewhat superhuman gift with which time and suffering, deception and ingratitude, have endowed this queen. But with that ardent nature of hers, that passionate enthusiasm for everything noble and beautiful, she must have passed through many a surprise, submitted to many an indignity, and felt the stirrings of many a rebellion, before winning that ultra-terrestrial smile which seems to form an integral part of her being. “Almost everyone of us has passed through

his Gethsemane and his Calvary," she wrote once; "Those who rise again belong to earth no more."

Amongst my most delightful recollections of the castle of Sinaia I count the morning walks along the forest paths. It was then that I was permitted to converse with Her Majesty at greater length. The Court life at Sinaia, which is in a wild part of the country, high in the Carpathians, was simpler than in the large stately palace of Bucharest, both king and queen showing themselves so gracious and admitting their guest into all the charm of family life.

Generally about nine o'clock, with the sun shining gaily through the fresh morning air, and near the end of September, an usher would knock at my door and say in Roumanian accents: "Her Majesty is about to take a walk, and is asking for you down-stairs, captain." I immediately descended, running down the soft-carpeted stairs, with armoured panoplies on either side. Below, I found the queen smiling, her fine figure, with its graceful lines, encased in a European robe of white cloth

etiquette requiring the Roumanian costume and long veil only inside the castle). By her side, dressed in black and leaning on her arm, stood the Princess of Hohenzollern (the mother of King Charles and of the late Queen of Portugal). Then came two or three maids of honour, no longer wearing Oriental costume, but dressed like fashionable young ladies of the West, in neutral tints, somewhat after the English style, — giving them the appearance of quite different persons, so great was the change.

The keen mountain air was delightful to breathe. The sun shone brightly with that glorious light so usual in the Levant. On grass and moss were mirrored drops of dew, little crystals of hoar-frost, as we started along the sandy paths which straightway disappeared in the forest, beneath the giant firs.

The queen seemed happy and tranquil. As at all times, her countenance wore an expression of reposeful freshness, — and yet she had been working four or five hours, having risen before the dawn, the first in the castle to be astir. Ensconced in a cosey little corner, she

had already ended her daily task, written out her orders, finished her letters, and covered several pages of foolscap with her dainty, free handwriting. All this so that she might be free to attend to her "daughters" and guests and give herself up wholly to visitors and music, to conversation and games.

From time to time, King Charles joined in these morning walks. The worthy soldier always appeared wearing his military tunic buttoned from top to bottom.

Now that I have mentioned him, I will say a few words regarding his general aspect. He had a benevolent, grave countenance, with very refined, regular features. His beard was raven black. A deep, anxious line furrowed his brow, generally giving his face a gloomy expression, but his smile redeemed everything, — a kind, attractive smile, like the queen's. And what distinction and simplicity, what natural grace and majesty! How perfect the courtesy he showed towards his guests!

Generally the king would walk apart from the rest, accompanied by the Princess of Hohen-

zollern, and the queen refrained from breaking upon the *tête-à-tête* of mother and son, united by such a bond of affection, and who were destined so soon to be separated (I also remember the farewell day on which the princess returned to Germany, and we all accompanied her to the Austrian frontier). A feeling of veneration comes over me when I think of this princess-mother, so beautiful in spite of her years, in her long lace and black dress; she seemed to me the ideal of a princess, — the ideal of a mother as well, bearing a distinct resemblance to my own whenever she looked at her son. . . .

As I am not a Roumanian, and shall probably never return to that distant castle where I was honoured with so hospitable a reception that I can never forget it, I feel absolutely free to say how delightful in every respect this royal family was. I only wish I could express my meaning in quite exceptional language, bearing no resemblance whatever to a courtier's adulation.

In an open space some distance from the castle stands a strange-looking hunting lodge,

of ancient Gothic architecture, filled with bearskins, aurochs' horns, and boars' and stags' heads. Here the queen has a very quiet, mysterious room for work and study. The whole building suggests the chalet of the Sleeping Beauty, hidden away amongst the firs ever since the Middle Ages.

Here, every morning, all assembled before returning to dress for lunch. The queen's "daughters" and maids of honour, who had not joined in the walk, had reached the rendezvous by another path.

It was here that I first heard the queen read us one of those *Stories* she signs *Carmen Sylva*. A religious silence fell around as soon as the music of her voice began to be heard.

It was a heart-rending little tale, written with rare dramatic power, and I still remember how I thrilled with emotion as I sat listening. . . .

However, this is not the place to speak of her talent as a writer. I do not even wish to enter into the subject, however slightly, for to do this adequately would be a lengthy and seri-

ous task ; I only mentioned it for the purpose of relating a trifling anecdote which has remained in my memory.

Before beginning, the queen wished to take up her *lorgnon*, which was fastened to her bodice by one of those enormous diamond clasps such as queens alone appear to possess. Her "daughters," seated around, protested: "No ! It does not become Your Majesty. It's too bad to think that we cannot see Your Majesty's eyes !" One of them, evidently the *enfant gâté* for the time being, made a formal resistance, and the queen gave way, with a smile.

But after a few pages, as the writing appeared indistinct or her eyes became somewhat clouded, she addressed the girl with a beseeching smile, saying in suppliant tones: "Come, please . . . reading aloud makes me so tired ! . . ."

Just this short sentence, uttered in such a tone of voice by a queen, appeared to me something altogether exquisite.

The lofty firs surrounding us cast a kind of bluish semi-darkness over the pointed wood-carvings of the room in which we were sitting.

The splash of water was heard mingling with the queen's voice ; it came from a stream running down from the heights and passing close to the hunting lodge.

I was sufficiently close to Her Majesty to see the words of the book as she turned over the pages, and great was my surprise to discover that what she was reading in French was written in German. It would have been impossible to guess it, for there was not the slightest hesitation in her charming diction ; even the phrases she improvised were always harmonious.

Only once did she pause for a word which did not come to her mind, — the name of a plant whose equivalent in French she had forgotten. “Oh ! . . .” she exclaimed, looking up to the ceiling, — and then she began a little impatient tapping of the foot, endeavouring to think of the word. Then, of a sudden, she shook the arm of the girl seated by her side, with the remark : “Come, now, what are you doing to help me to find the word . . . you little log !”

Her charming voice and manner transformed

this familiar phrase — which, coming from the lips of another, would have seemed trivial and commonplace — into something delightful, something distinguished, so unexpected and droll that we burst out laughing. . . . All the same, it happened just at a point where she was reading something that brought tears to our eyes as we listened in perfect silence. Carmen Sylva, reading her own works, is the only person who ever stirred me, with fiction, to the point of making me weep; perhaps this is the strongest praise of her talent that I can give, for even at the theatre, where men are so frequently moved to tears, I am never affected in the slightest degree.

On another occasion I heard her perform the same wonderful feat in translating from the Roumanian. She was reading aloud an old mountain ballad, transposing it right off into rhythmical, poetical French. It would appear as though it were a matter of indifference to her which language she used as the vehicle of her thoughts. In this respect she resembles those accomplished musicians who play a piece

of music in any key with like facility and intensity of feeling. . . .

Now that I have come to the end of these few notes, I have the impression of having said nothing of what I wished to say. It was my intention to speak of Her Majesty, Queen Elizabeth of Roumania, whereas I have merely touched the fringe of my subject. I have described the frame rather than the portrait, and that but lightly by reason of my excessive respect and reverence and from fear that I might not make it sufficiently life-like and beautiful.

I hope Her Majesty will not be angry with me for attempting to sketch her shadow, should these pages chance to come to her notice. All the same, that sentence in her *Thoughts*, which one might regard as her own description or painting of herself, startles me somewhat: *Some women are majestically pure, like swans. Offend them and you will see their plumes bristle up for one brief moment, then they turn away in silence and take refuge in the bosom of the waters.*

THE EXILE

THE EXILE

BUCHAREST, APRIL, 1890.

I



HIS morning, as I entered the queen's rooms, I was surprised at seeing an unwonted profusion of flowers; the salons were full of roses, like the sanctuaries of Indian idols on special days of worship. There were bouquets on every seat, on the gilt forms, the Oriental cushions and the dainty, artistic tables; others were in flower-stands made of reeds, suspended by ribbons of the national colours; other buds, of a golden yellow tint, were arranged so as to imitate the royal crowns.

At the far end of the salon, on a slightly raised kind of platform, sat the queen, who was once more being fêted. She was dressed in white, as usual; her white hair surrounding her still youthful countenance, which was lit up with

a smile indicative of the most exquisite kindness of heart. Two maids of honour, sitting at her feet, were tearing open and reading telegrams of congratulations, with which a silver tray was filled. . . .

“. . . Signed Humber First,” one was just saying.

Another began: “This, madame, is from the Queen of Sweden, who wishes Your Majesty . . .”

As I entered, the queen smilingly raised her head, and, in tones of ineffable melancholy, gave me the explanation she evidently saw I was expecting:

“This is my *fête* day . . . but of course you knew nothing of it. I ordered these little maidens not to tell you; for I receive quite sufficient flowers, *mon Dieu* . . .”

The unfinished sentence clearly indicated that the queen was not deceived by such a profusion of roses.

One of the two maids of honour seated by her side on this occasion was destined soon to return to a life of obscurity; the other was

Mademoiselle Hélène . . . who, at a later date, had the misfortune to see her name in all the journals of Europe, in connection with her short-lived betrothal to the heir to the throne.

She was quite small and would scarcely have been noticed at a first glance, though she soon attracted attention by the charm of her intellect. She was gay and childlike on the surface, but possessed of a soul that was not easy to fathom; somewhat intoxicated with her literary success and rapid rise; ambitious, perhaps, though with every excuse for it, and, at all events, capable of spontaneous outbursts of affection and love, especially for such as did not oppose her. The queen, at first attracted by the rare intelligence of Mademoiselle Hélène . . . , had gradually come under the sway of her poetic talent. Herself a childless mother, in perpetual mourning for her own daughter, she came to lavish a truly maternal affection on this adopted child, who was so marvellously gifted.

In honour of the queen's *fête*, — the last one she received from her own people, — there

was a private reception in the palace that afternoon.

About two o'clock there began to arrive all the maids of honour whom the queen called her "daughters." She received them in a large salon containing a church organ, which rose to the dim-looking ceiling. They entered in small groups from the conservatory; and it was a dream of delight to see them wearing embroidered robes all spangled with gold, for, on this occasion, the queen had bid them wear the old national costume, and was herself dressed in a severe-looking cloth-of-silver gown, and the long, old-fashioned veil.

Amongst the new-comers, I saw many whose acquaintance I had made three years previously at the fairy castle of Sinaia, and with them I exchanged a few pleasant words of greeting.

All these giddy, elegant creatures, however, infatuated with the fashion of the day, these pretty, dark eyes, with their searching, treacherous glances, were more than ever out of harmony with bygone customs. Besides, even then there was an element of ingratitude, of

hatred and cruelty, in the courtesies, the hand-kissing, and the smiles they gave the queen. . . . Oh ! It was not so in the case of all, certainly ; some were loyal and faithful, grateful and warm-hearted, quite different from the rest. But the majority, suddenly seen under unexpected circumstances, sent a cold shiver through my whole frame. . . .

And what a change had come over the queen in these three years ! So youthful in appearance then ; and now, overwhelmed by a loss that could never be forgotten, some great deception, perhaps ; thin and aged, with the light all gone from her smile !

Tzigane musicians (Laotaris) followed ; these were hidden away in the conservatory. Beneath the artificially sun-lit palm-leaves, which, seen from the dim salons, bore a striking semblance to an Oriental garden, only their auburn locks could be seen, like so many coolies in an Indian jungle, hiding away in ambush ; whilst the sad, fevered strains of their music fell faintly on our ears.

Then all these dangerous little gold-spangled dolls formed themselves into one long chain, delightful to behold, and, following the fashion of the day, began an old but popular country dance, called the "hora."

They entreated the queen to join them, which she was quite willing to do with her never failing good grace and a perpetual sad smile on her brow. The chain had now formed itself into a circle, and she advanced to the centre, taller than any of her "daughters," and dressed all in white, wearing her silver cloth gown and muslin veil, amid the many-coloured embroideries and the spangles of the rest. She resembled a sedate, gentle figure from some Byzantine fresco, for she had for the first time put on, beneath her white veil, an old-fashioned head-band, which came very low down over the brow: "You see," she had said to her maids of honour that very morning, "at my age, I cannot continue to do without an old woman's head-band, in Roumania, can I?" Nor had any attempt been made to dissuade her, so well did it become her. . . . With a charm and art

that none of her "daughters" could equal, she danced the slow, solemn dance, which resembled a kind of ritual.

Then they requested her to sing; and, bent on pleasing them, she sang an old German *lied* which she asked me to accompany on the organ. All the anguish of her soul passed into her voice, and when it was over, I thought I noticed more than one pair of pretty, wicked, eyes brimming with tears. . . .

That evening it was my lot to take my seat at the small royal table for the last time. We were in the centre of the private suite of rooms, in a lofty circular dining-room of red marble, with black marble panellings, adorned with the paintings of old masters. Quite a simple dinner, on a round table just large enough for the six persons seated there: the king and queen, the prince royal, two maids of honour and the guest whom Their Majesties had graciously invited. But for the austere splendour of the place and the number of servants in Court livery, all silent and attentive, it would have

been the most intimate family meal imaginable.

During dinner the king always showed himself in the most affable and charming light, there being no trace of his usual grave, imposing expression, beyond a deep wrinkle between his dark eyebrows. "No one who sees that deep line on the king's brow," the queen said to me one day in accents of tender reverence, "would ever suspect how much labour and thought, struggle and suffering, have gone to create it."

But neither the benevolent simplicity of the sovereigns, the youthful faces of the prince royal and the maids of honour, nor even their quiet laughter and chatter, could dispel a feeling of sadness, which seemed to descend from the lofty ceiling above.

The red marble rotunda looked down upon high dimly-lit rooms, the magnificence of which bore the impress of the king's austere, refined tastes. These rooms included the library, at the farther end of which was lit the historic lantern of the gondola of the old doges of Venice.

The two maidens, rendered nervous by the somewhat sequestered life of the palace, cast startled glances from time to time about them, as though in vague dread of beholding some phantom or apparition of the past.

What was the cause of all this? Perhaps the isolation of the life without; perhaps that empty, magnificent open space, guarded by sentinels, and that dead silence in the midst of one of the noisiest cities in the world, where the rumbling of carriages and conveyances is most restless and intermittent. . . . Indeed, one was conscious of something unusual in the air, something never felt at a great Court dinner, all blazing with light, and which might be said to suggest palaces and the oppressive burden of royalty.

By the side of the heir presumptive, every evening, at the small family table, sat *Mademoiselle Hélène*. . . . Doubtless this continual association had already given birth to feelings that might easily have been foreseen. It was the most natural thing in the world that a

prince of twenty-four, kept strictly away from the pleasures of his age, living a life of intellectual labour and military manœuvres, should fall in love with a bright, extremely intelligent girl, the only one, moreover, whom he was permitted to see at all intimately. The romance here outlined, which a certain section of the press did its best to mar and spoil, was thus essentially honourable and straightforward. And the idea of marriage, however opposed to established rules, became the only one capable of offering itself to a youth, brought up as was the prince royal in quite a puritan atmosphere and having the most worthy examples about him to follow; Mademoiselle Hélène, . . . whose keen intellect, moreover, was by no means calculated to excite the seductions of a fleeting love, but far rather to hold and retain true affection.

The following evening I was to start for Constantinople, and I well remember my distress at taking leave of the queen in this palace to which I had so strong a foreboding that I should never return.

I was ignorant as to where lay the danger, or from what direction the ill wind would begin to blow, but the impression left upon me by that last day, and by the *fête*, was a dull inward chill. As I watched the young guests, on taking leave, kiss the beautiful hand of the queen, I caught premonitions of hatred and hardness of heart in those who bowed most devoutly, and in the sovereign who smiled upon them I divined a new-born clairvoyance, an indulgent though boundless mistrust.

II

A year later, the queen, seriously ill, was taken first to the south of Italy and afterwards to Venice. It was alleged that she needed the milder sea air and the constantly moist atmosphere of the lagoons.

In reality, it was the beginning of her exile.

And there, in Venice, I was permitted to come and see her, though for the last time. . . .

III

VENICE, Friday, 14th August, 1891.

It is an August morning, at daybreak. Summoned by Her Majesty, I arrive from Nice for two brief days, all the leave of absence from the squadron that I am allowed.

We are just beginning to see distinctly when I descend from the Genoa express at the station of Venice, which resembles a tiny island. Everything is still indistinct in that hazy semiobscurity before the sun appears, a kind of luminous mist, of a grey-linen hue, peculiar to the last few mornings of summer.

At the station harbour, I enter one of the dark-looking gondolas shut in like a floating sarcophagus, which ply for hire in Venice as cabs do in other cities.

We start off, gliding over the still waters of the streets, immediately finding ourselves, after a few windings, in a maze of old surroundings, between black-looking, ancient houses, full of cracks, and still plunged in the slumber of past ages. The silence of these watery streets calls

to mind some gloomy town of Ys, drowned and submerged in the long-distant past, but which the sea would appear now to have forsaken.

Then a sudden turn, and we come out into open air and space. The light of dawn reappears and we have before us the magic splendour of the Grand Canal before it awakens to life, lying there absolutely motionless, of a uniform pearl-grey hue, with the pink dawn appearing, here and there, above the tops of its palaces. . . .

Still, on the present occasion, I scarcely look at this marvellous Venice; the only value it has to me now is that of being a charming accessory, a somewhat ideal background or frame to the sweetly sad figure of the queen, the fairy I have come to visit.

Another turn and we are once more in semi-darkness. For the second time we make our way into the narrow streets, between the old, black-looking buildings which rise above the dismal waters. There is still slumber all around, and the silence of the early morn. When, perchance, some distance away, as we approach a dark crossing, the regular splash of oars is

heard, my gondolier raises a prolonged warning call which goes echoing between the damp marble walls, — these deserted streets are as sonorous as a vault, — someone yet invisible responds, and soon there appears another gondola, as black and shut in as mine, and the two sarcophagi glide past each other in perfect order. . . .

With my thoughts farther and farther away as I draw near my destination, I follow neither the route nor the direction taken, I have even ceased looking. . . . And now we are about to pass beneath that “Bridge of Sighs,” whose name is as antiquated as an old romance, but which still leaves anything but a faint impression, when seen appearing in view so unexpectedly. . . . Then we emerge from the darkness into wide-stretching, luminous, pink-tinted space, and suddenly we find ourselves in the Great Lagoon, with all the glory and splendour of Venice before us: close by stands the palace of the Doges and the Lion of St. Mark; away on the other bank, situated in the midst of sunlit waters, like some fairy isle, stands St. George the Greater, its dome and campanile ablaze

with light. All this is a classic, an eternal marvel, known to all, for it has been painted again and again, but so glorious is the summer dawn, that I do not think any artist has ever had the courage to use such vivid tints of pink, red, and orange for the light and such iris violet for the shade.

And now we reach the hotel Danieli, where the queen is staying.

This hotel Danieli, where in former times the Republic of St. Mark received its ambassadors, is one of the most beautiful Gothic palaces in Venice. It stands close to that of the Doges, and is in the same line with it. The interior still retains its marble staircases, its mosaic floors, and magnificent ceilings in two or three of the rooms. In these democratic times, however, it has become a vulgar, an ordinary hotel, at which anyone may put up.

The whole of the first floor, containing the large halls and the State salons of old, had been reserved for the queen and such few members of her suite as still accompanied her.

The friendly faces that welcomed my arrival

have a sad, disquieting expression which I never saw at Bucharest: the queen's secretary, her doctor, a maid of honour, Mademoiselle Catherine. . . . Ah! She, at all events, was sincere and faithful! . . . May I be pardoned for mentioning her, and acknowledge, in passing, her discreet and steadfast devotion to her sovereign.

About ten o'clock I am informed that the queen can receive me. The room to which I am conducted is guarded by loyal old servants whom I remember having frequently seen at Bucharest.

Right at the end of the large salon, the doors of which are surmounted with royal crowns and from whose still splendid ceiling hang huge Venetian glass chandeliers, reclining in an arm-chair, I saw the queen, dressed in white, and with a gracious smile of welcome on her face. . . . But how that face had changed, how thin it was! . . . She seems to have aged ten years since last spring.

"She is so ill," Mademoiselle Catherine had

said to me that very morning. "Besides, she cannot walk any more; we have to carry her or roll her in the arm-chair; her graceful bearing and queenly gait have vanished."

Seated on a stool at her feet, like a little coaxing child, is Mademoiselle Hélène . . . , dressed very simply in pink, nothing escaping her dark, inquisitive glance. In her attitude there is a something affected, as though she were playing at being the spoiled child of this adorable mother; besides, I noticed that whenever no one was watching, or she was practically alone with the queen, her attitude towards the latter was invariably of a colder and more reserved nature. I do not mention this as a reproach: so few women are capable of appearing just as they really are, without a more or less affected pose, or even unconsciously calculating the effect they are producing. Moreover, I have not the faintest doubt but that she had a sincere feeling of attachment for this adopted mother of hers, and that she shed genuine tears when bidding her a last farewell.

Around the queen is the little group of eight

or ten, — faithful to a certain extent, — who have been with her since leaving Bucharest, and now constitute her Court in Venice. Conversation is almost gay, but complete confidence seems lacking. With a laugh, the queen utters the following sentence, which indeed is not far from the truth, “We are the exiles of Venice, you know.” She continues, more sadly, “And some allege that we are even a little group of malefactors against Europe. . . .”

Here I must briefly state what, at this date, was the position of Mademoiselle Hélène at the Court of Roumania. The simple maid of honour I had formerly known was now betrothed to the prince royal. True, Parliament had never given its consent to the marriage, and the king had just withdrawn his consent. Still, there was no rupture, for the prince royal, recalled by his family to Germany to live in strict seclusion within his hereditary castle, had given back to Mademoiselle Hélène neither her promise, letters, nor engagement ring. The queen, who was so anxious to bring about the

marriage of these two adopted children, and who, through urging forward this *mésalliance*, had drawn upon herself the disfavour of the nation, had not yet lost all hope. The entire press of Europe published malevolent comments on the strange situation. And Mademoiselle Hélène, . . . after visions of the throne and a four months' sojourn in this enchanted dreamland, was beginning to feel that everything was crumbling to the ground, as when one awakes. . . .

This was the first time the queen had appeared before me, apart from her special environment, or setting, so to speak, I mean, away from her palaces in Bucharest and Sinaia, in which the maxim of elegance defined, I think, by E. de Goncourt finds such justification: "A person's good taste may be judged by the good taste of the things around him."

Here, doubtless from a feeling of intense lassitude, the great stately salon, which might have been so beautiful to behold, had been left just as it was, with its lodging-house orna-

ments of the most atrocious taste, modern gilt bronzes beneath globes, and — a detail quite unexpected — the vulgarly rich arm-chair in which Her Majesty sat languidly, was covered with a small white crocheted veil.

The work-table alone revealed the queen's presence, for it was spread with writing-pads and a number of precious writing utensils stamped with her initials and crown.

As soon as each sheet was finished, it was torn off. Poems and spontaneous thoughts, novels and dramas, were conceived and feverishly transferred to paper, in the exhausting effort to lay hold, as rapidly as possible, of all those unexpressed ideas to which her fertile imagination gave birth. This work was of unequal merit; some was of sublime grandeur, some again incomplete, thrust aside, as it were, by the budding germ of the work following. She did not take sufficient pains with her writings, — it being the queen's opinion that, in the matter of literature, everything ought to be spontaneous, written in obedience to the initial impulse and then left as it is, without there being any neces-

sity to perform the indispensable task of condensing one's own thoughts ever more and more, and thus making them as clear and intelligible as possible to the reader. The extensive literary output of Carmen Sylva, very little of which has appeared in French,—most of it being destined to be forever lost or unpublished,—would have needed passing through the hands of someone capable of pruning and curtailing it, and that conscientiously; after such treatment, this work of genius would have attained to the place it merits in public esteem. . . . Oh! I do not mean to say that the queen's writings are not charming, just as they stand; she soars aloft in a manner unattainable by so many clever writers of books; and even at her weakest, one is ever conscious of the presence of a great and noble soul, throbbing with pity for human woes,—and that is sufficient for those who are sensitive, for those who mourn,—though it may not be for the crowd of official scribblers. One even wonders how it has come about that this woman, born a princess and crowned a queen twenty years ago, can thus

have sounded all the depths of human sorrow, and thoroughly sympathised with the distress of the poor and the down-trodden.

And how motherly you feel her to be in all circumstances, how conscious you are that her heart must often have been torn with the grief and the infinite tenderness of a *Mater Dolorosa*!

You are also aware that she is indulgent towards all sins and failings, with the serene indulgence of a spotless soul; free from the prudery of the impure and looking upon everything with rare breadth of vision and the spirit of forgiveness. This, indeed, it is that in certain narrow-minded, pharisaical sects in Germany raised up against her bitter and implacable enemies, even amongst those who ought to have cherished her name and upheld her cause.

I think the very illness that keeps her confined to this arm-chair is the result not so much of grief and trouble, as of a state of intellectual overwork, of that fevered condition in which one feels that the pen runs too slowly to express the thought. I remember how she spent her

time at Bucharest and Sinaia ; from my room in the palace I saw her lamp burning every night at the window of a distant tower. It was lit between three and four in the morning, and there, in peace and silence, she would work alone until the usual morning occupations began, or her "daughters" came in a group to bid her a pleasant good morning ; then, without apparent fatigue, until eleven at night, she went through her daily round of duties, a perpetual smile and a look of never failing charity in her face.

On the table of the salon, my eyes involuntarily fall on a manuscript, whereupon the queen says in that musical voice of hers, with its delightfully foreign modulations :

"That is my new book, at which I am working so hard ! Do you know, I am afraid I shall not finish it and that it can never be published. I intend to call it *The Book of the Soul*, and will read you a few passages if you wish."

"Oh ! Not here," she continued, on my eager acceptance of this gracious offer. "This

afternoon, in the gondola. You see, I spend my days on the water; that forms part of the treatment of a poor patient. To keep me company, you will be forced to do the same and live on the lagoons all the time you stay in Venice."

The Book of the Soul! On the queen's table, I looked at the unfinished manuscript, divining from the title alone what it must be: a kind of swan song, a masterpiece of grief, destined to be heard only by a few intimate friends, and whose very pages have perhaps now been destroyed. . . .

With a smile of resignation and in gentle tones that seemed to extend forgiveness to all her enemies, the queen added:

"All the same, I must warn you to be on your guard: this is the work of one who is insane! My head, it appears . . ."

With her beautiful, though almost transparently thin, hand she described two or three circles in the air to indicate—she was now laughing heartily—that she was accused of being very light-headed. . . .

Indeed, an entire party was at that time trying to insinuate that Her Majesty had lost her reason. This was repeated throughout Europe, in more or less corrupt journals. It was even one of the least harmful things then being retailed by one section of the press, against a sovereign who was to be crushed and ruined at whatever cost.

Soon afterwards luncheon was announced, and then I witnessed something of a painful nature, though now it happened daily: two men-servants, whose special duty it was, presented themselves for the purpose of removing the queen in her arm-chair, for she was unable to walk.

“Oh! Thanks! Just wait a moment, please, will you?” she said, so gently and politely that I immediately called to mind that sentence from her *Thoughts*: *A true lady has the same manners with her servants as with her guests.* . . . “I feel a little better this morning, so I will try to go alone.”

Very slowly at first, she rose to her feet, tall

and upright, a thing she had not done for months, and looked round upon us all with a charming smile, as though to say :

“You see I was right ; I feel much better.”

Thereupon she deliberately started off for the dining-room, the rest of us, in utter surprise, following in her train.

Glancing at Mademoiselle Catherine . . . walking by my side, I remember the joyful expression, so full of affectionate hope, which came into her eyes.

“Look at the queen,” she said. “Incredible !”

Our joy was not destined to continue, alas ! After all, such deceptive changes for the better are characteristic of this malady.

In the dining-room, the queen did not sit at table. She lay stretched on one of those Empire couches, the gilt arms of which represent swans, and there she received, at the hands of Mademoiselle Hélène . . . , who served her with the most respectful attention, a small quantity of special food in tiny cups, almost such as a child would use for her doll !

IV

As soon as luncheon was over, we entered the gondola for our long, aimless sail, a daily experience, peaceful and soothing. Along the old marble staircase, the same two servants carried the queen in their clasped hands, forming an extempore chair on which she was transported right to the door of the hotel. A few inquisitive spectators, — as always happens when a queen passes by, — including a dozen tourists, had collected to watch the sad procession and greet the queen with respectful bows.

A dark-looking gondola, of mourning black, as all the gondolas of Venice have remained ever since the sumptuary laws; on the ends the two traditional sea-horses, of shining brass; behind, the large, dark, black-curtained shelter; the gondoliers, in a dress suggestive of the stage, though here it forms an actual uniform for the crews of the leisured classes: white shirt and trousers, with a very long blue silk girdle streaming behind.

Without indicating any special direction,

the only order given them was to go slowly, and we set forth, wherever their fancy willed.

We were speedily lost in an old quarter of the city, silent as death, beneath the shade of closed-in, mysterious-looking houses, overhanging us from great heights; along these submerged streets we made our way by jerks, noiseless and scarcely perceptible, over the silent, stagnant water. The queen, reclining with sovereign grace beneath the shade of the dark shelter, a maid of honour on either side, looked exquisite, though it filled one's mind with anguish to behold her. Everything except herself, moreover, seemed but of secondary importance, nothing but frame and accessories, so to speak. The foreboding that she might soon be taken from us made us concern ourselves with her alone and with the thoughts to which she gave utterance, or even her slightest remarks, to which the sound of her voice added special charm. From time to time we passed by some old Venetian palace we could not help noticing; or, as we wound round one of those shaded, watery streets, there appeared a wonderful vista in the

distance: some dome or spire, with the golden sunlight streaming on it, only to disappear from view a moment later.

The queen had again become almost gay; for after all, it was a principle of hers that one must always smile, like the gods. "A certain outer gaiety," she once said to me, "like one's toilet, is a matter of decency or good breeding; that is your duty both to your neighbour and to yourself, just as one ought to contrive to be no more unsightly to behold than one can possibly help." She looked out from between the black curtains of the shelter, appearing to take an interest in the various incidents, as we slowly sailed along.

We were now passing through a poor and populous quarter, with narrow streets into which it was as impossible for the light to stream as into the bottom of a well. Evidently it was bathing time for the little ones. From the windows, the parents kept watch over them as they splashed about, close to the doors, in the still water. Some of the tiny infants looked so comical in their bathing costumes that the queen could not refrain from a hearty laugh.

Then silence again fell on the party, as though the anxiety caused by thoughts of the dim, uncertain future were pressing heavily on all.

Absentmindedly, perhaps even in slightly ironical tones, the queen asked Mademoiselle Hélène . . . :

“Ah ! Has any one seen the papers to-day ? Is there anything new concerning us ?”

“Certainly. To think that I had forgotten to inform Your Majesty. . . . In those of France, there is quite a serious item of information. . . .”

Then, after a pause which made us only the more attentive, she continued, without the slightest change of expression :

“It would seem that I have committed suicide for the third time !”

This was so unexpected, and uttered in so irresistibly droll a tone of voice, that we all burst out laughing.

“Yes,” continued the young lady, calmly, though in somewhat savage and mocking accents, “this time it is laudanum ! It appears I swallowed a considerable quantity, but Your

Majesty, warned in time, succeeded in restoring me to life."

About that time, indeed, the journals were continually giving details of the suicide of Mademoiselle Hélène . . . and as she was very intelligent and rather inclined to scoff and ridicule, all this introduced quite an unexpected and comical element into the painful situation. I remember, too, what she said to me in this connection, and this time she showed herself grave and dignified: "Never! . . . Just what a servant-girl would do, is it not? . . . I quite agree that such a *dénouement* would settle many difficulties, but it is too vulgar a solution to please me." She further implied that there would be greater dignity in retiring to a life of obscurity and quiet, which subsequently she actually did.

In Venice, she still felt interested in all the excitement she was causing in Europe; for she was too young and too womanly not to enjoy the intoxication of the romantic adventure of which she found herself the heroine. True, the press had converted this love story, which was

so honourable and natural, almost inevitable in fact, into something dramatic and strange. All the same, to pass as a charmer, or even a perverse instrument of destiny, still, in some respects, excited the imagination of Mademoiselle Hélène . . . ; at all events, this seemed less cold and gloomy than the deathlike silence which was subsequently to be her lot when she was in disfavour and had left the court never to return. . . .

All sadness had now departed, thanks to the beautiful autumn evening sun, as his setting radiance streamed over Venice. Those who watched the passage of the handsome gondola, from their windows, peering through the curtains of the shelter at the white princess who was enjoying the sail, might easily have caught snatches of gay conversation, borne across the water.

During the past year the queen, to my mind, had made considerable progress towards that state of supreme dispassion which brings with it perfect serenity of soul and the favour of heaven.

When twilight fell, we had made considerable progress, finding ourselves in a lonely quarter, and separated from Venice by a wide lagoon. The silence, the old ruins of houses and quays, the still water around, suddenly filled us with gloom as the light faded away. A sort of old curiosity shop, containing Venetian glass and old iron all covered with dust, attracted our attention as we passed along; so we craved the queen's permission to land on this deserted quay, and examine the strange articles for sale.

Extraordinarily slender and dainty little ewers, small caskets ornamented with swans and dolphins, were what we discovered as we rummaged about in the dust-covered collection, a number of strange objects which we purchased as we went along, — as quickly as possible so as not to keep the queen waiting too long, — finding pleasure in drawing lots when, perchance, the same article was pounced upon by more than one of us. And Mademoiselle Hélène . . . , quite a child on such an occasion and free from any visible sign of affectation, ran off, on each new acquisition, to show her prize to the queen, into

whose care it was forthwith handed; whilst Her Majesty, whom, contrary to all etiquette, we had left alone, received this childlike way of doing things with indulgent, motherly smiles.

The night had almost fallen when we returned to the hotel Danieli. Immediately after dinner, we were to start again and enjoy a serenade.

The queen, who refused to eat anything, keeping up her strength by means of some medical preparation or other, remained lying in the gondola; she merely ordered that the latter be rowed out more into the open, in order that she might enjoy a greater degree of quiet. She assured us of her wish to be alone, so as to compel the rest of us to dine in the hotel dining-room.

But it was not long before we returned. Meantime, our music had arrived: a large broad gondola, lit up by numerous lanterns and containing a double string quartet, a chorus, and two soloists — a contralto and a tenor.

The illuminated gondola started as soon as we had taken our seats in the queen's, and we followed. The black shelter had been removed,

and, in the dim light, we could see the white fairy, reclining on her cushions.

Then, following in the wake of the music, we again began a slow, winding sail, now passing along wide streets, well lit within and without, for the moon was shining brightly, and then again traversing some dismal old quarter, dark almost as pitch. A number of other gondolas also followed, our floating *cortège* increasing with each bend of the lagoon, and all these silent lovers of song, gliding behind, listened to the serenade.

Natural and languishing, thrilling one through and through, was this Italian music; at times rising in an anticipated crescendo and echoing between the marble walls of the palaces, and then again dying away by degrees in lingering cadences. There was no trace of fatigue in the thrilling voices, which were employed with a degree of skill native to this land, even in the case of the least gifted singers.

The music of a people is intended to be heard in the country which gave it birth, with its natural environment of sound, odour, and light.

Even this Italian music which, speaking absolutely, is of an inferior kind, may charm the soul to its depths when thus heard at nighttime, reaching one's ears, — with its occasional delightful surprises caused by echoes or varying distances, — from an ever gliding gondola, which one follows, in a reclining posture, rocked on the surface of the waters, now near, now far away, — in the midst of the glory of Venice, and beneath the summer moon and stars.

“This forms part of my treatment,” said the queen, with a smile. “Songs and the open air are my doctors. You know the beneficent influence of music on . . . (she pointed to her head). Remember King Saul of old. . . .” Her irony, however, modified by the sweetness of her voice, never succeeded in manifesting the least tinge of bitterness.

We now formed a long *cortège* of over a hundred gondolas, an eager pushing throng, grazing the stones or the marble walls, as we glided along the narrow streets. Close by, in barques which obstinately hugged our own, I remember there were some beautiful young women —

whether Venetians or foreigners I know not — extravagantly attired and wearing lace mantillas. The light from the beacons enabled us to catch a glimpse of them from time to time, lying stretched on cushions. Moreover, the queen had been recognised; her name was repeated from mouth to mouth, and the crowd, interested in the charming patient, maintained a discreet attitude.

People came to the windows to watch the serenade pass below, greeting it with applause. The sound of violin or 'cello would at times add its mystery to that of the human voice, as we advanced in that music-laden darkness. . . .

Beneath the Rialto Bridge it is customary for serenades to halt. Here, in stranger fashion than elsewhere, between the stagnant water and the archway of stone, the vibrations become intensified. We made a rather lengthy stay, listening to a plaintive duet, with chorus, which gradually — doubtless because of the place and the hour — came to sound in our ears as a sort of incantation.

Back at the hotel Danieli, about eleven o'clock, we took leave of the queen. The windows of the old palace looked down on the lagoon, resplendent beneath the moon's beams. Not a breath of air that warm August night, glorious beyond compare. Right in front, beyond the reflecting waters, could be seen two figures of St. George the Greater, the one of a luminous grey tint, rising heavenwards; the other darker and reversed, plunging into the watery depths. Above, in the mighty azure vault, and below, in imaginary depths, shone similar stars, in perfect symmetry. And the silent gondolas, shadow and substance, with two sterns and two prows, like black paper-cut figures that have just been unfolded, passed along, with their red lanterns, between the two skies, looking as though they were proceeding through empty air, dragging behind them long undulating streaks in their train.

Then, for the first time since my arrival, I became fully conscious that I was no longer in a Venice of dreamland, such as was visible from between the curtains of the shelter, but in the real Venice, which in itself alone deserves to be

visited and admired. And, so as not to lose so glorious a night, I again went down to the quay, took the first gondola that came up, and out again into the open, in the direction of St. George, on the other bank.

We advanced slowly, with no special aim in view, fascinated by the light of the moon mirrored in the still water. Little by little, as we went farther away from the bank, the delicate, exquisite outlines of the palaces became more distinct.

Thus did Venice, the Venice of classic story, wrapped in the moon's soft beams, quite unchanged in its main features, once more become the one, incomparable city, wonderful to behold, as in the centuries long past.

V

SATURDAY, 15th August, 1891.

A splendid sky and the sun brightly shining. The bells of Venice are ringing out from every steeple, for to-day is the festival of the Assumption of the Virgin.

This morning the queen is more dejected, more sad and depressed than she has been for some time. In the first place, yesterday's apparent improvement has not been maintained, she has not even the strength to stand upright, and the ominous two men-servants are again needed to carry her from one salon to another.

The news of a recent execution troubled her greatly. A treacherous servant-girl, whom the maids of honour had long ago surnamed Marino Falieri, had just been dismissed and sent back to Germany, convicted of having purloined and copied some of the queen's letters and pages from her private diary, for the benefit of some mysterious enemies. . . . Ah! It is quite certain in the case of anyone at all acquainted with this ideal queen, that nothing in these pages, if read aloud to the whole world, would be of a nature to rouse doubts regarding her integrity and rectitude, though dangerous politics might occasionally have been mentioned, useless revelations made, and cruel truths told. What appalled the queen most of all was to feel herself surrounded by anonymous enemies,

lurking beneath her very shadow, so to speak, and who shrank from nothing, not even from such cowardly expedients as this.

Then, too, another mail had arrived from Germany without bringing any letter from the prince royal. His expected reply was not forthcoming. The queen, whose somewhat intolerant loyalty caused her to rebel against such treatment, had written to him several days previously, calling upon him to state whether or not he had withdrawn his promise, and if he had, to return to Mademoiselle Hélène . . . her letters and betrothal ring. In fact, the marriage seemed broken off, though the prince had said nothing; days and weeks passed without any answer.

At the first blush, one is tempted to blame him, and yet, before judging from the ordinary standards, we must remember that there may have been State reasons for his silence, that he was very young, and perhaps suffering, and finally that absolutely nothing is known of his inner struggles or of the pressure that may have been brought to bear upon him.

And also, before attaching any degree of blame to Mademoiselle Hélène . . . for giving way to ambitious dreams, we must ask ourselves if any young lady, whoever she might be, loved by a charming prince, the heir to a throne, would not have done everything possible to bring such a marriage to a successful issue.

About eleven o'clock, as the sun was blazing down upon us, the queen had requested to be carried back into her room and left alone for an hour or two, to try to obtain a little sleep. Her two maids of honour, her secretary, and myself thereupon set out on foot, proceeding along the quays and the arcades of the palace of the Doges, then taking the large paved squares, and finally going along any passage where it is possible to walk about as in an ordinary town. We hastened to make our several purchases and return before Her Majesty awoke, so that not a moment of her precious presence might be lost. To us, this was an occasion of relaxation and recreation, almost of child's play, such as happens from time to time in the most anxious

and storm-tossed periods of life: we felt almost as though we were playing truant, in a place where, after all, we were practically strangers and free to enjoy ourselves in this innocent fashion. All the dealers of the Piazza San Marco had spread out their white tents; as we hurried along, an African sun streamed down upon innumerable displays of glassware and the jewellers' shops, all coral red; its rays shone everywhere, on cathedral and palaces, burning and flashing upon that wealth of mosaics and statues which makes up Venice.

A few passers-by, however, turned to look again at us, as though half recognising Mademoiselle Hélène . . . , the romantic heroine of the day. And she, with soul lulled to rest, or perhaps because she was carefully concealing her true feelings, seemed this morning to take a child's delight in everything she saw. On calling to mind the news contained in the previous day's papers, we even exercised our imagination in dwelling on the possibility of the four of us committing suicide, with all kinds of dreadful details, right in the middle of the

Piazza San Marco, — a catastrophe which assuredly would have dumfounded the press.

Feeling somewhat rested on awaking, the queen read a letter from the king, stating that the political business which detained him in the East would soon be finished, and that he hoped to be in Venice within a few days. She appeared glad at the idea of seeing him again.

During the midday meal, she asked how we had been spending the time, — as though we were children returning from a walk, — listening with an indulgent, almost amused, smile as we told of our purchases, the terrible heat of the sun, and even the suicide idea. From time to time the laughter shone in her eyes, lighting them up as we had so often seen in the past.

This, indeed, in happier times, was one of the signs and charms of her profound, though delightful nature, these furtive outbursts of gaiety and spontaneous laughter, invariably aroused by the most incoherent, fleeting, and childish trifles. After all, a nature that is rigidly correct and knows nothing of this kind of laughter

and childlike innocence is almost inevitably harsh and limited in its outlook, or at all events of a very ordinary and commonplace type.

We started again for our daily sail in the gondola. Yielding to my entreaties, the queen had kindly brought with her the manuscript of the *Book of the Soul*, to read passages from it aloud as we went along.

"Not just now," she said; "this evening, when we come to a quieter spot, a little farther out. I feel so tired. . . ." And her resigned smile, so sweet and sad, seemed to crave indulgence for everything she did.

At first, not a word was uttered, for we all felt sympathy with the queen's dejected attitude.

By degrees, however, obedient to her will, the life returned to her voice and eyes, — as we continued to glide along at the same measured swing through old, sad-looking quarters, with their armour-sheathed windows. At first, the conversation was intermittent, consisting of short, tired sentences; but gradually the queen grew more animated, she regained her wonted

vivacity, and, touching upon one subject after another, we came to speak of the religions of India, of Buddhism and Nirvana.

Then Her Majesty and myself engaged in a discussion on such questions as the survival of the soul and the eternal *revoir*. Oh! We did not discuss the reality of these things, alas! . . . but only the more or less consoling forms in which such books as claim to be revelations have presented them to mortals. And I defended — both because I was really attached to it and because of the sweet traditions of childhood — the ineffably alluring Christian creed, convinced then, as I am now and shall always be, that no more radiant or glorious mirage will ever enchant the long hours of suffering or give consolation at the moment of death. And some misunderstanding or other must have arisen, though, at bottom, we were of the same mind. The rest of the party, listening in the gondola, now began to use stronger arguments than the queen had used, and appeared to insinuate that the *Book of the Soul*, to which I was about to listen, contained a more consoling message than

Christianity could give. The queen, doubtless absent-minded, permitted them to champion the bold proposition they had put forth, and to speak, in terms almost of disdain, of the faith which, for centuries past, has brought peace and comfort to the dying. They themselves were the initiates, learned in the *Book of the Soul*; they were in possession of something superior, something more soothing, which caused them to think pityingly of the Gospel. To me, it all appeared childish blasphemy and puerile vanity; of a sudden, the queen seemed less great, by reason of the false pride inspired by her book, and a painful feeling of sadness came over me at this unexpected disappointment. . . . Then I began violently to defend Christianity, as though I had been personally abused and insulted.

This was followed by an embarrassing silence, spell-breaking and disenchanting. The gondola was still gliding through the stagnant waters, past ruins and the old quarters of the city. It was again the bathing hour; from time to time little girls came out of the houses and took delight in swimming after us, their laughing faces,

like those of little sirens, rising above the water, close to the gondola.

VI

Now we are far from the land, on the vast lagoon, and quite alone. In the distance, Venice appeared much lower, for domes and spires had regained their true proportions, rising, in mingled groups, high above the houses.

The maids of honour declared this to be a suitable place to stop and open the *Book of the Soul*, which they had brought with as much ceremony as though it were the Tables of the Law. I now dreaded the reading that was to follow, as something vain and foolish.

The queen, however, still smiling serenely, replied that it was too soon, and that we must first lunch, like ordinary people out on a picnic. At a sign of her hand, the two gondolas following us and bearing the rest of the small court, drew up alongside the one in which we were seated, and Her Majesty, opening a luncheon basket, began to distribute our portions to each of us, playfully treating us as though we were

children. Then came the turn of the gondoliers, whom she served herself, with her beautiful, almost transparent, hands. We partook of bread and cake, currants and peaches—the beautiful, sun-ripened fruit of Italy.

In this connection, there comes to my mind a trifling incident, one, however, which in itself affords a striking index to the queen's nature. On her lap, over her white dress, she had spread a small light-grey mantle, with several overlapping capes. An overripe peach fell on it, leaving a slight stain. "Oh!" she exclaimed, in half jesting, half serious accents, "What a pity! And I was so fond of this little mantle!" On handing it back, after shaking it over the sea, I ventured to remark that there was scarcely any sign of a stain and that in any case it would not be seen, as it chanced to be underneath one of the capes.

"Oh! whether it is seen or not is a matter of indifference to me. All the same, *I shall know it is there*; and that is sufficient, you understand."

An answer expressive both of her great loyalty and of her purity of soul.

The summer sun was a glowing ball of fire, low in the heavens, when the queen began the promised reading of the *Book of the Soul*. His ruddy golden tints flashed upon Venice in the distance. And there lay our three gondolas, at rest on the surface of the broad lagoon. Not another barque was visible.

Before beginning, the queen gave me a reproachful look, a very kind though roguish and confident glance.

Then that incomparably charming voice of hers began to make itself heard. She read slowly, in a way entirely her own, with a gentle soothing effect, like the music murmuring through some stately cathedral. One would have been content merely to listen to the voice; that alone would have been a delight, even if the meaning and sense had not been clear. My mind, however, was somewhat anxiously intent on grasping the signification of every word. . . .

How beautiful the book was, how different from what I had feared! There was nothing

dogmatic, nothing subversive or presumptuous. It was the expression of the human soul probed to its depths, and the effect was strange and novel; every page seemed to breathe forth a spirit of deep humility in suffering. The chapters were short, each developing some rare and profound thought, clothed in grandly simple language, as poetical as that of the Bible. From time to time came passages chanted in a kind of apocalyptic tongue. The peace and comfort that breathed from this endless plaint lay in its spirit of sweet resignation, of pity for the lowliest of her fellow-beings. The book was a new and sublime form of prayer, the beseeching appeal to a God, raised by an entire humanity. It made no presumptuous claim to destroy, to build up, or to promise anything.

And to think that this book, almost throughout a work of genius, a work in which her nobility of soul shone brightest, is doubtless now lost, torn up, or burned; to think that men will never read it! . . .

From time to time the queen stopped. "Oh! I am so tired," she said, "so tired. . . ." For

a brief moment her voice seemed to fade away and die. Yes, worn out through suffering for others: that was more evident than ever, when one looked upon her colourless face, which vied in whiteness with her hair and her dress.

Then the music of her voice returned, in a fresh outburst of sound, as she sang the mysteries of the soul. And I remember my surprise when my gaze once chanced to fall on the gondoliers, as they sat there motionless, leaning over towards the queen, unable to grasp anything beyond the charm of sound and rhythm, listening all the same, in captivated wonderment at something they felt to be religious and sublime.

The light was growing dimmer and dimmer. The great red sun had just disappeared behind a corner of the city.

Two small, strange-looking women had by this time approached in a tiny canoe. They were frail and ugly, of an age and class impossible to define. They handled the paddle with the skill of savage women and were dressed in English bathing costumes. Drawing near, they sprang into the water and swam right up to the

gondolas. For a few moments they listened to the queen as she read, a strange, evil look on their faces, then they dived and swam away, only to reappear shortly afterwards.

"I cannot see any longer," said the queen. Whereupon the gondoliers removed the shelter, and the white fairy appeared more in view as the light faded. Her voice, too, was growing fainter and fainter. Venice now appeared outlined in the distance against the pale yellow sky. And in the twilight, the two little creatures, noiselessly diving again and again, seemed like mocking evil spirits of the night, held there, all the same, by the charm of that melodious voice.

Finally we said, "Enough, please do not read any more, Your Majesty is quite worn out. . . ." The manuscript fell from the queen's hand. Night had now closed all around.

Back in the hotel, the queen, really exhausted, was straightway carried to her bed, and I was deprived of the pleasure of spending my last evening in her company. I was to leave Venice next morning, and she had promised to receive

me for a few moments in her room before I took my departure. As I bent over to kiss her hand, just when the two men-servants carried her away in her arm-chair, I had no suspicion I was seeing her for the last time.

Entering my room, I had not been there more than a few minutes when a faithful servant of Her Majesty handed me one of those familiar grey envelopes, stamped with her initials and crown. It contained a sheet of paper on which she had written in pencil, in large elegant characters :

I hope you no longer think my book claims to be more consoling than Christianity. No, all it claims is, that it is true.

After all, how few attain to real Christianity! What falsehoods have found refuge beneath that excellent cloak! Leave us to pass through those phases of intellectual development along which we are probably predestined to travel. Fear nothing; we are too honest to be shattered and destroyed.

CARMEN SYLVA.

I sat long at my window, leaning on the balcony of Gothic marble, and looking at the fairy-land of Venice in the summer moonlight. I reflected on the sombre destiny of this admirable, this revered woman. Memory brought back to me, in that great palace of Bucharest, the cruel eyes of all her "daughters," on the occasion of her *fête*, those "daughters" who owe everything to her and yet bear her a grudge for not doing even more for them.

I know not what political errors this queen may have committed to have incurred such disfavour in a land to which she had given her whole heart and life. After all, it would not be for me to judge them.

There is only one fault I can see clearly: that of having tried to bring about this marriage, and imagined that a maiden, one amongst so many others who envied the favour lavished upon her, could become a queen in her own country! And this fault was probably more dangerous than all the rest; the one which all those little charming dolls, who, a year ago, danced the *hora* in a long gold-spangled chain

around their sovereign, will never forgive. This was the origin of that raging feminine hatred which stops at nothing and gradually brings every other kind of hatred into manifestation.

And there welled up within my heart a great wave of pity for this queen, a feeling of despair at my inability to defend and avenge her so little.

VII

SUNDAY, 16th August.

This morning, half an hour before my departure, I came down to bid farewell to the queen.

There, in the large salon, I found the maids of honour awaiting me. The queen, they tell me, is much worse than the previous evening. They have both spent the night by her bedside. It is quite impossible for her to receive me.

Then I begin to write down all I intended to say in that farewell conversation. I hand my letter to the two maids of honour and a gondola takes me to the station.

Seated in the carriage which is to convey me to Genoa, I see approaching a *faquino* who had run after me and is perspiring freely. He hands me a grey envelope bearing the royal arms and containing the following message, written in pencil :

I can scarcely write, for I am in bed and feel much worse.

On the other hand, your enthusiasm has been so helpful to us! Still, I should have been glad to resume our discussion in a calmer spirit. Then you would not have taken fright; you would have seen how fervent and sincere Christianity still is in our hearts, and how far-reaching are our hopes. Fear no petty meanness in your small circle of devoted friends!

CARMEN SYLVA.

VIII

NOVEMBER, 1892.

This was the very last time I saw the queen's handwriting.

I know not in what gloomy silence she is enveloped, behind what leaden curtain her fair open countenance is veiled. Vague rumours reached me that she had been taken away, far from all her companions of the past, to the banks of an Italian lake, there to spend several months in rest and solitude, and that she is now in a gloomy castle on the banks of the Rhine. . . .

CONSTANTINOPLE IN 1890

CONSTANTINOPLE IN 1890



AN uneasy feeling of profound sadness comes over me as I begin this chapter. On being asked to write it, my first impulse was to put forward some excuse or other, but that seemed to be a kind of treason against the land of Turkey; so now I begin.

Still, in the present instance, it is more impossible than ever for me to give an impersonal description, with that unconcern and mental detachment an artist requires. Once again, those who wish to follow me must reconcile themselves to seeing everything with my eyes: it is almost as though they must catch faint glimpses of mighty Istambul through the mirror of my soul. . . .

Istambul! The most magical of all the names that still fill me with enchantment and delight. No sooner is it uttered than there stands out-

lined before me an inner vision: at first, in the vague distance and high in the air, I see a faint sketch of something gigantic, the silhouette of a city that compares with none other. At its feet lies a sea ploughed by thousands of ships and craft of every description in ceaseless motion and agitation, whilst a very babel of sound is heard, uttered in every tongue of the Levant. Like a long horizontal cloud, smoke hovers above the dense mass of black steamboats and gilded *caïques*, above the motley crowd who raise their strident voices in sales and bargainings, an ever present mist casting a veil over all the tumult. And there, above this steam and coal-dust, appears the great city, suspended in midair, so to speak. Into the clear, open sky shoot minarets, keen as lances, dome after dome, large and round, of dull greyish white, rising tier upon tier like pyramids of stone steeples: the still mosques, unchanged by the rolling ages, — whiter, perhaps, in those bygone times before our Western steamers had defiled the surrounding air, and the swift sailers of the past were the only ones to anchor in their

shade, though still of the same type, crowning Istambul for centuries past with the same gigantic cupolas, and giving it that unique silhouette, the result being more magnificent and splendid than any other city on earth could offer. These mosques represent the unalterable past; their stones and marbles manifest the old Mussulman spirit, still dominant wherever they are to be found. Whether coming from distant Marmora or the far-off plains of Asia, they are the first thing one sees emerge out of the moving mists of the horizon; above all the paltry turmoil of modern life on quay and sea they carry the thrill of old memories, the great mystic dream of Islam, the thought of Allah the terrible, and of death. . . .

At the foot of these gloomy mosques I have spent the most unforgettable time of my life; they have been the constant witnesses of my adventures — as those delightful days sped by so swiftly. I saw them everywhere, with their great round domes, now white and dull beneath the summer suns when I would seek the shade of the plane-trees on some lonely old square; and

then again dimly black in December midnights, beneath the cold uncertain moon, as my *caïque* glided secretly past sleeping Istambul; ever present — and almost eternal — by my side, as I passed along by chance and with no thought of the morrow. Each mosque seemed to exhale a different kind of sadness, a peace and spirit of meditation all its own which hovered above the solemn neighbourhood around. By degrees I came to love them with a strange love, the more I lived the Turkish life, the more I became attached to this proud, dreamy race, and my soul, passing through that period, filled with mingled anguish and love, began to open out to Oriental mysticism.

And afterwards, when I had to leave, how profound was the melancholy which came over me one pale March evening, on the Sea of Marmora, as I watched the outlines of the city gradually fade away and finally disappear from view. . . . When everything else was dim and almost out of sight, the great domes and minarets still appeared above the cold sea mist, and the loftly, stately contour of Istambul was the last

to vanish. This final image symbolised, so to speak, all the bitter regrets I was leaving behind, all that dear Turkish life for ever ended : that one silhouette was graven on my memory, never again to be effaced. During the wandering years that followed, especially when travelling on distant seas, often have I seen in dreams that city of domes and spires outlined on the grey imaginary horizon of my slumbers, each time bringing with it an impression of sadness, as of a dear lost fatherland. I could sketch it by heart, without a single error, — and, in real life, every time I return, there comes over me a feeling of mingled sadness and delight, which the flight of time has scarcely yet succeeded in diminishing.

Still, I do not think the mirage of my personal memories deludes me unduly as regards the charm and the spell of this aspect. It is undisputed as well as legendary ; whosoever the travellers may be, even though they know nothing about the place, they are strangely impressed when they draw near the city and that imposing silhouette begins to take shape in the distance

And as long as Istambul — though daily becoming more commonplace, and continually being desecrated by all — retains the charming outline of this first approach, it will remain, in spite of everything, the wondrous city of the Caliphs, the Queen of the Orient.

Around Istambul are grouped other districts and towns, series of palaces and mosques whose *ensemble* forms Constantinople: first, we have Pera, where the Christians live; then, along the Bosphorus, from the sea of Marmora to the Black Sea, an almost uninterrupted succession of suburbs. And all these various parts of the same whole communicated with one another by means of boats and *caiques* innumerable. The motley crowds of the great city are scattered along the coast, — and the sea is covered with passers-by who continually come and go in rapid succession.

These districts are quite distinct from each other; different in race, religion, and customs.

No capital anywhere could be more diverse in aspect, more changing from hour to hour, for

sky, wind, and clouds vary incessantly. This is a climate of burning summers and gorgeous light; it is also one of dismal winters and rain showers, of snowy mantles suddenly shrouding thousands of black roofs.

And it seems to me as though the streets and squares and suburbs of Constantinople belong to me in some degree, and that I also belong to them. I feel a grudge against all these boulevard loungers, deposited here in crowds by the Orient express, for I cannot help regarding them as trespassers profaning a domain dear and sacred to me, and feeling nothing of the admiration and respect that old Istambul still commands. These districts, which they look upon with vapid astonishment and with which I am better acquainted than with those of any other city in the world, in bygone days I traversed at all hours, day and night, obeying the dictates of my fancy, and mingling generally in the life and interests of the humblest of the people. But how could I speak here of all this with the requisite degree of impartiality? Every step I take I recall memories of youth and love. How could

I be expected to judge these memories when I adore them ! . . .

Before writing this, I was determined to pay another visit to Constantinople, as a mere tourist, for the purpose of obtaining a more detached impression of a city with which, alas ! I have not a single living link remaining, my only duty being that of visiting tombs in the cemeteries.

I proceeded thither from Roumania, in the spring of 1890, in the month of May, via Rustchuk, Varna, and the Black Sea. All the passengers are on deck, on the lookout, so that they may not miss the entrance of the Bosphorus, a classic site, extolled in all the guide-books.

Throughout the world there are far more gorgeous sites, with more luxuriant vegetation and loftier mountains ; it is in its inmost details, doubtless, that the unique charm of the Bosphorus lies, — a very real one and quite independent of my own predilections, since it is felt by all who come here.

And now we have Cheragan, Dolma-Bagche, a line of snow-white palaces on marble quays

along the seaside. And the sight becomes beautiful beyond compare, for through the morning mist the three towns simultaneously appear over against each other: Scutari on the left, in the form of an amphitheatre on the Asiatic coast; Pera on the right, tier upon tier of houses and palaces covering the entire European coast; and there in the middle, on a headland projecting between the two, towering above the confused jumble of smoke and craft and dominating all else, — the stately domes and minarets of Istambul!

On the heights of Pera, in a hotel filled with English tourists where I have put up and form one of the crowd, there is a marvellous view from my sitting-room over the Golden Horn, the head of the Old-Seraglio, and the endless stretches of azure sea dotted with the isles of Asia. The glimpses one obtains over immense distances from every side form one of the subtle attractions of this land; each of these three towns affords a view of the other two, with the sea in the background; wherever you live, you are

sure to perceive, rising above the housetops and the trees, fairy scenes outlined in the air. Indeed the range of vision here is wider and more far-reaching than in any other place with which I am acquainted.

Six o'clock the same evening. (May I be pardoned for spending the whole day in a pilgrimage to the cemeteries, and in souvenir visits to various spots of interest to no one but myself.)

The hour of sunset finds me on the quay of Tophaneh, seated in the open air in front of a café, — as is the custom in the Orient, — watching the passers-by as the shades of night fall.

The quay of Tophaneh is filled with a medley crowd who come and go; it is a kind of vast square, the outlet of wide thoroughfares, the tributaries of districts entirely different from one another.

On fine evenings, half the pathway is obstructed by rows of divans, of red or motley velvet, and occupied by smokers plunged in reverie. They sit there, as though in the pit of a huge theatre, watching the mighty stream

of Oriental life, and the coming and going of ships on the Bosphorus. Above the blue waters and the far-distant hills of Asia rises a lofty mosque, with its intricate and complex dome and its minarets with their open galleries. It is set off with glaring white and yellow, two altogether Turkish tints in which all the framework and panelling of the comparatively modern buildings are decorated: most of the mosques, palaces, and modern mansions are partially painted in these colours, which match well with the distant blue of sea and sky, for they serve as a background to the motley groups of passers-by and the red head-gear which is to be seen everywhere. Nor must we forget the crude green of the large slabs, ornamented with gold inscriptions, which are inevitably to be seen above every porch, gateway, or fountain. White, yellow, and gold-striped green are the colours of the elegant mosque opposite as well as of the surrounding kiosks and of all that mass of Oriental-looking buildings which stands out against the dull, glimmering blue tints of the Bosphorus and the Asiatic coast.

The rows of open-air divans gradually become filled with persons representing every costume and every race in the Levant. Bustling waiters hurry about, carrying tiny cups of coffee, raki, bonbons, and glowing embers in small brass vases; and the long, pleasant evening hours of Oriental idleness begin; the *narghiles* are lit, and yellow cigarettes fill the air with odorous fumes. All kinds of people and carriages pass along, handsome cavalry riders on their well-groomed steeds going to or from the Sultan's palaces; livery-stable keepers, leading their saddled horses by the bridle; sailors of nondescript nationality out for a stroll now that their day's work is over; itinerant traders tinkling their little bells, or screaming out at the top of their voices the merits of their cakes, sherbets, or fruit of various kinds. . . .

At Galata, whose principal thoroughfare — in a state of eternal clamour and uproar — ends in this square, there rises a shout and din, louder and louder, until it reaches, somewhat muffled by the distance, the loungers seated on the red divans. This Galata is the mighty babel

of the Levant; from the whole district rises an infernal noise all along the Bosphorus until morning dawns.

Here, too, debouches the largest of the steep streets mounting to Pera — the Christian suburb perched above our heads. On both sides of the street, beneath bowers of vine leaves, sit hundreds of porters engaged the whole day in carrying, from ship, quay, or custom-house, travellers' trunks or bundles and bales of goods, and now taking their refreshment in front of the Turkish cafés which succeed one another in unbroken sequence. Scarcely a foot of ground remains unoccupied by their little stools and tables. Glad of their evening's rest, they come along, one after another, and ask for a *narghile*: these men, whose business it is, by the aid of their broad shoulders and limbs of steel, to take the place of waggons and carts, which are unknown in Constantinople.

The crowd gradually swells in volume, and soon the mass of porters actually touch one another. They are all dressed alike in rough brown cloth, oddly streaked with red and black,

the jacket wide open, exposing to view their stalwart, sun-burnt chests. Their serried ranks rise tier upon tier, varying with the steepness of the street, their murmuring voices mingle with the peculiar gurgling sound coming from their innumerable *narghiles*, and intoxicating fumes increasingly fill the air as night falls on the scene. . . .

This way of spending the evenings has remained the same ever since I can remember — everything that happens during this hour in the various districts of the immense city returns vividly to my mind ! . . .

Towards the north, by the broad thoroughfare parallel to the sea, may be reached the Sultan's quarters: impenetrable palaces, lofty walls enclosing parks, barracks, and seraglios. All that the night brings hither is peace and quiet, beneath the avenues of acacias, now all white with bloom.

On the heights above our heads, cosmopolitan Pera will soon light up its great European shops, filled with goods for sale, modelled after those to be seen in London or Paris. Beneath the

artificial light, carriages will roll to and fro, in Western fashion. Instead of diminishing the incessant stir and tumult of life, the approach of the evening hour, with the gas everywhere ablaze, rather intensifies it. Tourists rush about as they return from their day's excursions, eager to feel themselves safe in their hotels before night overtakes them. *Table d'hôte* is served in English fashion; out in the street, you feel as though you were in Europe. Levantine women wear loud, extravagant dresses; large-eyed beauties who would have looked so attractive had they been dressed as Greeks, Armenians, or Jewesses. All the same, in this amusing *pêle-mêle*, we find the Oriental touch in the numerous red fezzes, the gangs of porters, with their medley of embroidered costumes, having mounted from the more Oriental streets below, or again — since that portion of the city is far above the sea-level — in glimpses of distant scenes, the dull blue expanse of the Sea of Marmora, or a portion of the Asiatic coast, almost lost to view in the twilight. . . .

Behind us and beyond the overhanging hill

of Pera lie the Jewish, Armenian, and Turkish quarters, scattered about hillside and valley, all along the Golden Horn and facing mighty Istambul, which overtops them from the other bank. It is mostly by sea that they communicate with one another, in light *caiques* which remain in perpetual motion as long as there is the faintest glimpse of light in the sky. . . . How strange that the mere proximity of things long lost sight of has the power to revive their memory! It is almost fifteen years since I lived here and I had almost forgotten how the evenings were spent and yet I need only find myself idly dreaming in Constantinople, — though in a different street, far away from my usual former haunts, — and lo! everything comes back to my mind with the utmost distinctness, as though I had left the place only the previous day. . . . First, the very Turkish quarter of Kassim-Pacha, with its tiny old houses, all in Oriental style, its little ancient-looking shops and cafés, with their overhanging plane-trees: this was one of my favourite resorts in bygone days. Even now I see it in imagination, with its own peculiar

animation as evening approaches. Sailors belonging to the marine service are everywhere, having just left the arsenal or the great black ironclads anchored opposite, in the Golden Horn. Laughing heartily, they stroll along in groups, hand in hand, crowding the streets and squares. All wear fezzes, and their collars are red instead of blue: with this exception, they resemble our own sailors. Women await them (mothers or sisters, naturally) and fall in by their side; they wear long white, blue, or pink veils. Their officers, too, halt here for a smoke, in the humblest cafés frequented by the poorest of the people. Moreover, these very democratic interminglings of rich and poor are peculiar to Turkey: pachas and beys drinking in public in the company of the poor, chatting with them and explaining the news—all without loss of dignity, for Mussulmans never drink to the point of intoxication. Other districts follow, assuming more and more a village aspect the farther one advances into the interior; then the deserted, trackless, barren country begins, with a sad charm of its own, in spite of the

fact that it is dotted with tombstones everywhere.

The Golden Horn separates all these quarters from mighty Istambul, over which a kind of religious silence is about to descend as night falls.

And in the heart of this gulf, locked within a city, beneath the old cypress and plane-trees, lies the sacred quarter of Eyub, the soul of Islam in Europe, buried in a sort of funereal grove, close to the great cemeteries, and with tombs all around. It slumbers in awful silence, broken only from time to time by the chanting of psalms in a neighbouring mosque. In all the kiosks of the dead, before the lofty catafalques crowned with turbans, small night-lamps will soon be lit; passing along the sombre avenues, they are seen shining through the window-frames, like yellow eyes in the darkness.

For great Istambul is about to sink in almost as peaceful a slumber as in past ages, whilst Western tumult and noise are beginning in those portions of the shore occupied by infidels. In the new streets, around the neighbourhood of Santa Sophia, a few shops, here and there, will

be lit up, and the shining lanterns of some straggling café may be seen : everywhere else in the immense city, mysterious darkness and dull slumber will reign supreme. It would appear as though this Golden Horn were something more than an arm of the sea separating the two parts of Constantinople, and that it actually set up an interval of two or three centuries between the active fevered life on the one bank and the peaceful sleep and quiet on the other.

Whilst I am here, plunged in reverie out in the street on this red divan and watching the crowd passing in the dim light through the fumes of *narghiles*, suddenly, high in the air, a flaming circle appears as a signal around the slender spire of a minaret in Tophaneh—the religious illuminations: the Ramazan! . . . I had forgotten that this was the ninth month of the Mohammedan year, when every Turk belonging to the lower classes turns night into day. And I was expatiating on the calm of Istambul! . . . Very soon, it will be more noisy than Pera and Galata combined, and the uproar will

be continued throughout the night, — so I shall join the crowd and share in this unwonted gaiety. . . .

It is time to return to lunch at the hotel. Instead of making my way to Pera along the direct and steep route, I will make a sign to one of these good fellows before me, leading their saddled horses by the bridle, and will make a circuit, right through all the noise and tumult of Galata, before subsequently ascending by the Field of the Dead.

Galata, in the late twilight and illumined with lanterns ! Noise and racket on all sides ! Somewhat startled, my horse skips about on the pavement, in the midst of numberless passers-by, and a sea of red fezzes and rough-spun costumes. Other horsemen pass along at full speed ; there is a continual coming and going of carriages and heavy tram-cars, preceded by runners blowing horns. An indescribable odour of alcohol, absinthe, and aniseed fills the air. The large and dangerous coffee-houses open their doors and are

speedily ablaze with light; the great would-be alcazars illuminate their flag-decked *façades* — here an Italian pantomime is being played, whilst close by an orchestra of Hungarian ladies plays selections from Strauss. Resorts of ill fame are already crowded; the men and women seated in front of the cafés obstruct the narrow pathway and frequently come into unpleasant contact with the horses. One is deafened by the hubbub of conversation carried on in many tongues, as well as by the confused clashing sound of cymbals, tinkling bells, and big drums. I trot past the surging masses, amusing myself by calling aloud, as in bygone days: “*Bestour! Bestour!*” (Look out! Look out!), the cry of Turkish crowds, just as “*Balek! Balek!*” is that of an Arab mob. . . .

In the hotel above, the usual banalities of a *table d'hôte*. A tourist, recently disgorged by the Orient Express, deigns to make a few practical enquiries:

“There is nothing to do in Istambul at night, is there, monsieur? (This is the stereotyped piece of information served out to one by every

hotel guide; viz. that during the evening hours there is nothing to see in Istambul, and that it is dangerous to walk the streets of the city.)

I stare at him, and then reply :

“Oh, no, monsieur : nothing at all in Istambul. Here, in Pera, however, close by, you will find two or three most delightful *howlers* of the *café chantant* type. . . .”

After dinner I mount a hired horse and escape as fast as I can. . . .

It is a fine starry night as I make my way through Galata, which is in the height of the *fête*. Finally, leaving the noisy street, I halt, at the water's edge, close to a bridge which stretches away in the distance and disappears in the dim darkness. Here, a sudden change, like a fairy scene at a pantomime. The crowd, the lights and the noise : all gone ; a profound void of darkness and silence is in front of me ; an arm of the sea lies stretched between this noisy quarter and another great fantastic-looking city, which is seen in the starry background with its dark silhouettes of minarets and domes. It is a Ramazan evening. Suddenly, on every floor of

these minarets, around their festooned galleries, shine rows of fiery garlands, whilst in the empty spaces between these stone steeples pointing straight upwards, luminous inscriptions are suspended by invisible wires, as startling as apocalyptic signs traced in the air with a pen of fire.

I am eager to be there ; the invincible attraction of stirring memories causes me to hurry onwards along the dark, interminable bridge which leads, across this arm of the sea, to the dark-looking city. The nearer I approach, the higher rise the cupolas and minarets with their wreaths of flame. Now I am at their feet ; I quit the moving floor of the bridge for the pebbles and shingle of a dim-looking square over which towers a superb mosque : I am in Istambul at last !

I soon turn my back on the more modern quarters in the neighbourhood of Santa Sophia and the Sublime Porte, the boulevards recently erected in orderly rows and now lit up, alas ! by gas-jets, whilst venturesome travellers ride about in gaudy equipages. I now make my way towards Old Istambul, still a great city,

thank Heaven! ascending along small streets, dark and mysterious as ever, with yellow dogs rolled up on the ground and growling whenever one's feet brush against them. *Mon Dieu!* So far they have escaped destruction by the city officials, poor animals! I experience a feeling of mingled sadness and voluptuousness, almost of frenzy, as I plunge into this labyrinth where I am quite unknown now, though I myself know it all. It is as though the memory of a long-distant past, of a former life, were being restored to my present consciousness. . . .

It is a wonderfully peaceful May night. The semitransparent darkness allows me to find my way about. High above my wandering steps — so high that they afford no more light than the stars themselves — fiery circles appear on every side, suspended to the minarets of the mosques, with luminous inscriptions hanging in the air. The sombre, narrow streets I have taken suddenly open on to the immense Seraskierat square, with all its light and music, its many-costumed crowds. I merely cross this square to plunge deeper into the heart of the old city, into

the delightful and still unprofaned quarters of the Suleimanieh and of Sultan-Selim. Then follows an alternating succession of dismal little streets, of lights and human beings. In the cafés, Oriental music is heard: sorry violins groaning out soul-harassing melodies; cornemuses, or hornpipes, singing some old-fashioned air, in shrill plaintive strains. Asiatic peasants, all men, dance together in long chains, holding one another by the hand.

Amazing is a Ramazan night in Istambul, but this evening, the thing that charms me most is simply a harem passing along a solitary street, about midnight. . . . The street is very dark and narrow; above the lofty railed-in houses, over against a starry patch of sky, may be seen pointing upwards the minarets of the Suleimanieh, gigantic black lines — seemingly diaphanous — with two or three coronets of dying fires above each other from top to bottom. Profound silence; not a soul in view. Then there arrives a group of five or six women, wearing noiseless *babouches*; blue, red, or pink phantoms, wrapped up to their very eyes in folds of Asiatic, gold-

wrought silk. They are preceded by two eunuchs, staff in hand, who light the way by means of great antique-looking lanterns. It is all so charming and reminds one of a scene from the *Arabian Nights*, as it passes away and is lost from view in some corner or other of the mysterious labyrinth. . . . And the night seems darker than ever, on the disappearance of the lantern lights, whose shadows have now ceased to dance about on the old walls and pavements. . . .

TUESDAY, 13th May, 1890.

I continue the recital of my second day's impressions only at five o'clock — to break off before night.

At five o'clock, then, my back turned upon the modern quarters of the city, I enter a *caïque* and make for the farther point of the Golden Horn, on my way to the suburb of Eyub.

(For the benefit of those unacquainted with Constantinople, it may be explained that a *caïque* is a kind of long, slender canoe, — with the bow bent crescent-wise, — on which one sails

in a reclining posture. There are hundreds of them in every harbour, — like the gondolas of Venice.)

The Golden Horn is quieter the farther one sails from the entrance, which is crowded with craft of various kinds. The part of Istamboul along which I am now sailing is more ancient, more dilapidated and deathlike than I have ever seen it; these are the very old quarters, from which all life has gradually been withdrawing and transferring itself to the other bank. Nor had I ever before seen them with that aspect as of ruins overrun with verdure; the dark tops of the trees almost disappearing beneath the fresh green of the month of May. And there is Eyub at the farther end, surrounded by black cypresses and the great dark-looking woods.

A biting, almost cold, wind arises at the hour of sunset every evening, and small waves form on the surface of the ruffled water.

Eyub, the holy suburb, is still the unique abode of profound peace and silent prayer. At the entrance of the splendid avenue which runs parallel to the sacred tombs I land, and find myself on

stone flags, green with the flight of time. This avenue which opens out in all its whiteness buries itself in a kind of sacred wood dotted with tombstones, — a greenish whiteness like that of ancient marble seen in the shade. It ends in yonder impenetrable mosque, whose dome is just perceptible beneath a clump of huge cypresses and plane-trees. On right and left it is lined with kiosks of white marble, filled with catafalques, or with walls pierced with small pointed arches through which the cemeteries can be seen: strange-looking tombs with their faded gildings appearing in the green-tinted darkness of the undergrowth, all interspersed with a confused mass of wild rose-trees, grass, brambles. . . .

Only a very few ever pass along this avenue of the dead: dervishes returning from prayer or beggars on their way to the mosque, near whose doors they crouch for alms. This evening, there are three little Turkish girls, from five to ten years of age, looking very pretty as they play about in their bright green and red dresses. They form a striking and somewhat puzzling

contrast with the marble tombs and the funereal gloom of the surroundings. Besides, this was the first time I had ever been here in the full glory of the month of May, and I find the fresh verdure and the springing flowers form quite as jarring an element as these three little girls. Resorts of such infinite gloom never become gay and cheerful in spring; on the contrary, this soft, billowy sky, these clusters of roses, these jessamines hanging from the walls and which, for centuries, have smiled upon the passers-by, in so ephemeral and deceptive a guise, always at the same season: all this only adds to the impression from which no escape is possible: that of universal desolation, a state of nothingness.

WEDNESDAY, 14th May, 1890.

We numbered at least thirty guests this morning, all of us tourists, as we sat at lunch round a large table, adorned with yellow roses.

Formerly, the crossing of the Black Sea proved an obstacle, but now that there is a railway coming to the very foot of the Old Seraglio, amaz-

ing numbers of sight-seers arrive from every part of Europe, curiously peering here and there.

Nor can I reflect, without a smile, on the remark of the charming wife of the ambassador, as she glanced round at the company, an indescribably amused look in her eye, and said: "Oh, you see, nowadays I don't mind a tourist more or less. . . ." The phrase was devoid of the faintest tinge of discourtesy towards her guests, though it was uttered in such a way as to make the insignificant words seem extremely droll. All chosen guests, these travellers; very polite and pleasant in speech; the only objection being that there were too many of them—an artistic perception could not appreciate such an invasion; though let it be understood that, in uttering such a reproach, there is no more ill will in my mind than was shown in the remark of the lady at the head of the table.

This same evening, about four o'clock in the afternoon, it is raining in Istambul. The air has been heavy with storm all morning, and now it is pouring in torrents.

On leaving the Sublime Porte, I take refuge

for the rest of the day in the labyrinth of the Great Bazaar. (Istambul, following the Oriental custom, has its "bazaar" a city within a city, shut in by walls, and which closes its solid doors every night.)

It is dull and gloomy to-day with the rain descending, as one sits beneath the wooden roofing that covers every small street, listening to the trickling of the water as it oozes through the tiles. Through a kind of mist, or twilight fog, can be seen the glitter of gold-embroidered silks and satins, surrounded by thousands of *bibelots* hung up on the stalls; crowds of people swarm around: white-veiled women and red-capped men. Thank Heaven, this bazaar has scarcely changed at all! In familiar corners I recognise once more the same dark little cafés, flagged with their old tiled floors of Persian porcelain and the curious flowery decoration, in which the same tiny old cups have served for years and years. Looking out through the open door on to the Turkish crowds hurrying along in the fantastic shades of the avenues, one can indulge in the same dreams as in bygone days. In

these sheltered retreats, as one smokes the strong, light-coloured tobacco, the whole of this commotion and din away in the distance seems like the jostle and rush of a veritable army of ghosts.

Alas ! however, here are further attempts to imitate European glass-windowed shops. And a few groups of gaping foreigners — conducted tourists evidently — pass along, elbowing one another, in the tow of some bold-faced guide. (The English tourists take things more quietly : in spite of the fact that they walk about as though they owned the whole place, I really think I prefer them to the quizzing Frenchmen, who eternally complain of the ill-paved streets, find fault with the bazaar for containing nothing more than a collection of *articles de Paris*, and are disposed to believe that all these old turbaned dealers, crouching in their corners, obtain their carpets from the *Bon Marché* or the *Louvre*.) Off they go, saying they have seen Constantinople ; they even exclaim against Mussulman dishonesty, because they have been robbed and plundered (what else could they expect !) by the lower type of guides and interpreters, — who

are Greeks and Armenians, Jews and Maltese, or any other race except Turks. The ordinary Turk might be a boatman, a porter, or a common workman, he would never descend to the servile business of exploiting foreigners.

I linger for a time, bargaining for old *bibelots* in silverware, whilst outside the daylight is rapidly fading and the rain steadily falling. This bazaar looks more empty and desolate than ever, now that business hours are past; the shops close in the old, narrow-covered streets; buyers and sellers depart, and grey darkness falls on this labyrinth, which, throughout the night, will be nothing more than a bleak wilderness.

Really I must stay no longer, and so I mount once again a sorry-looking hired horse, dripping with rain, standing close to one of the doors of the bazaar, and make for Pera.

The rain stops, but the sky is still grey and lowering, the old roofs streaming with the recent downpours. Descending towards the Golden Horn, along narrow alleys, the puddles along the path send the mud flying in every direction as we trudge through them. Of a sudden, the city

has again resumed its winter garb, the one with which I am best acquainted and which attracts me most. Now my impressions become altogether personal: Istambul, on such a night, is ugly and dull, and still I like it best under this aspect. Slowly and regretfully do I return, in spite of the rain which is again drizzling in innumerable streamlets from the glistening roofs. How easy it is for me to recall the past, this cool, rainy evening !

On reaching the hotel, in quite leisurely fashion notwithstanding my dripping garments, I find awaiting me a note from His Excellency the Grand Vizier, stating that His Majesty the Sultan invites me to the palace of Yildiz, to see the illuminations of the Kadir-Guidjeki: “A *chaouch* [usher]” he informs me, “and a carriage will call for me. . . .”

Within about three-quarters of an hour, after snatching a hasty dinner and changing into a dress suit, I find myself driving at full speed in the direction of Yildiz, in an open landau, preceded by a *chaouch* galloping ahead, the crowds parting before him on either side. The sky is

once more clear; the stars are shining. The marvellous illuminations of the Ramazan are seen everywhere; whenever a distant glimpse is possible between the sombre-looking houses, it resembles a scene from fairy-land.

The palace of Yildiz is a considerable distance away, almost in the country, in the other direction from Istambul, which we are leaving behind in our rapid course. The Bosphorus, which also may be seen from time to time, and Scutari beyond it, are likewise illumined like the European coast; the fairy scene extends as far as the eye can reach.

In front of us, and running in the opposite direction, a surging mass of human beings rushes madly along; half-naked men galloping and shrieking. From the distance, I make out the sinister cry: *Yangun vâr!*

Fire! An ever recurring event where there are so many wooden houses. A whole district is ablaze, the flames filling the heavens with a great ruddy light, adding unexpected illumination to the *fête*. Those things that make such a dull rumbling sound as they are swiftly dragged

along are fire-engines, drawn by excited men, running at the top of their speed; the wheels get locked with those of my landau. . . . Shrieks and uproar. . . . The *chaouch* of the palace, however, is recognised, order is restored, and we pass on our way. . . .

Now we reach the broad, straight avenues, almost deserted, and resume our course at headlong speed.

Then, in front, shines a great white and yellow illumination, no conflagration this time, but fireworks and Bengal lights—the gardens of Yildiz. We pass the gates: then, a sudden cessation of all sound, we are galloping along silent, empty avenues, brilliantly lit and lined with myriads of fiery garlands and girandoles. Nothing but white lights in the trees and white globes on the grass; no motley colours here, whereas on the other hand the heavens seem ablaze with blue and red rockets, streaked with a multicoloured rain of fire.

The avenues continue to ascend; not a soul is to be seen. The illumination grows more and more intense, though in one direction the hori-

zon is lurid with the ruddy glow of the conflagration. Another gate; then the route is barred by battalions of horse- and foot-soldiers in serried ranks; they all carry torches or lanterns, as though a torchlight retreat on a large scale were being prepared. There are present hundreds of officers, most of them wearing Oriental dolmans, with long, flowing sleeves. What an imposing army!

These thousands of men, standing there motionless, seem absorbed in religious meditation, throughout these fantastic, dazzling illuminations, beneath that fiery downpour of changing colours which fill the dark sky.

My guide, the *chaouch*, utters the appropriate passwords, and a clear passage is made for us. He conducts me to the first floor of the palace through empty salons which are marvellously light, for the lamps within and the illuminations without flood the rooms with an intense glow. The wainscoting and furniture are of white and gold; a radiant light is over all. There is something indescribable in this silence, causing one to feel that all these armed men are standing

there, mute and almost holding their breath, as though overwhelmed by the presence of the Sovereign. Sweet strains of religious music come from without, a chorus of male voices, clear and limpid, chanting psalms in a strangely high key, with something unnatural about it all, extraterrestrial, if one might thus express the sensation. . . .

In the salons I am received by an *aide-de-camp*, who informs me that the Sultan is still in the Imperial mosque, whence issue these sweet strains. The service, however, is now almost over, and if I approach the window, I shall shortly see His Majesty leave.

At a distance of about fifty yards, a little below the window at which I have taken up my position, the mosque appears before me. It is quite white and new-looking, ornamented with arabesques, in Alhambra fashion. Illumined within and without, it appears to be as transparent as a delicate alabaster carving, and the music coming from it gives it an aspect of unreality, as though it were the principal item in the glorious firework exhibition now taking place

on every side. Around its strangely luminous dome appear the avenues and gardens along which I have come. Clouds of Bengal lights make the distance look quite blurred, confusing all perspectives — already sufficiently complicated by the heights on which I stand. A huge, transparent object, apparently suspended in the air, bears a shining inscription in Arabic on a dark background; the dazzling phantasmagoria makes it impossible to guess the distance of this aerial inscription: it looks large and far away, like some sign from heaven; this it is that gives the *fête* its sacred, Mussulman character. Still farther away, over the vague, dark expanse of water, which must be the Bosphorus, are little shining objects, very odd-looking, — these are ships, illumined even to the tops of the masts. . . .

Directly below, the splendid army, ever motionless and thoughtful, follows in spirit the prayers which are being chanted in the luminous mosque opposite. One would think the soul of Islam were at this moment concentrated in the white sanctuary. Ah! those chants whose vibrations fill this cupola, monotonous as magic in-

cantations, so rare and beauteous are their melodies ! One could scarcely be sure whether they were the voices of children or of angels ! There was something very Oriental about the music, the notes were maintained without fatigue or strain on the top notes, with the unchanging freshness of tone of a hautbois. The chanting was very prolonged, returning again and again to the first few bars in tender, soothing strains, expressing with infinite sadness the vanity of human life and the shrinking dread of Nature's mysteries.

Now, the Sultan is on the point of leaving the mosque. A slight movement of attention is noticed in the troops. A landau, drawn by erect, prancing horses, draws up in front of the marble steps of the mosque, on which red carpets have been laid ; at the same time, over a score of men-servants troop up, each carrying one of those enormous white silk lanterns, a yard high, which, from time immemorial, etiquette has insisted on having to accompany the nocturnal visits of the Caliphs. The choir beneath the

cupola is now chanting more loudly and at a quicker *tempo*, in supreme exaltation as the end of the service is reached.

Allah ! Here comes the Sultan ! The palaces and gardens, the very heavens glow with intenser light. The cannons roar like thunder in a storm, and the prostrate troops exclaim together as with one voice : “Allah ! Allah !” in loud resonant accents. . . .

The landau bears away the Sovereign, and the hundred yards which separate the mosque from the gates of the palace are crossed at a gallop ; other magnificent carriages follow close behind, in which are seated veiled princesses who have attended the service : the attendants rush to and fro, waving their great white lanterns, and with a clashing of steel the troops close behind the *cortège*. It is all over. . . .

Following an *aide-de-camp*, I proceed through salons and along passages, with their gilded and light-toned walls and columns. Here, at Yildiz, there is considerable moderation in adornment, a truce to luxury, as it were : the Sovereign, who possesses fairy palaces in the most enchanting

spots along the Bosphorus, prefers, for purposes of quiet work, the relative simplicity of this mansion, which he had erected in close proximity to a large shady park.

And now I find myself in a kind of immense court anteroom, of equal simplicity, whose sole luxurious element consists of magnificent carpets that deaden every sound. This evening it is filled with generals, *aides-de-camp* of every grade, in full uniform, some wearing long straight tunics and red fezzes; others, Oriental dolmans with large, waving sleeves and black Astrachan caps. They look very martial, and here, on the very threshold of the Imperial apartments, their effect is more imposing than the most magnificent uniforms would be. Amongst them, I notice the heroic figure of Osman le Ghazi, the stern defender of Plevna. All are standing, and they speak in low accents: a fact that seems to indicate the proximity of the Sovereign.

In effect, His Majesty the Sultan is seated alone on a sofa, in a small side salon, to which I am conducted by the grand master of the ceremonies. He is wearing a general's uniform, over

which is thrown a brown cloth military *capote*; there is nothing in outward appearance to distinguish him from the officers of his army.

It is long since I last had the honor of seeing His Majesty, and as I make my court bow, there suddenly comes into my mind the somewhat sad memory of our previous irregular meeting, of which, naturally, the Sovereign cannot have retained the faintest remembrance. . . .

This was nearly fifteen years ago, on the Bosphorus, the very morning of his accession to the throne — one of those fine sunny days which, imaged in the background of the past, seem more luminous than those we now experience. The large Imperial *caiques*, with golden prows, had come to take him from the headland of the Old Seraglio to the palace of Dolma-Bagtche. It was very early, few barqués were to be seen, nor was there any guard round the *cortège*. Ignorant of his identity, I was gliding past, when, as the result of a momentary blunder on the part of our boatmen, my *caique* ran into his. Thereupon the young prince, who was within a few hours to become the supreme Caliph, had me-

chanically cast upon me one of those absent-minded glances which mean nothing, his dark eyes seeming to peer anxiously into the future. . . .

Alas! That future has become the past of to-day, and the memory of this image makes me suddenly conscious of the abyss of time which separates both of us from that sunny morning in early youth. . . .

The Sultan always receives his guests with a quite natural graciousness and the most charming good-will. Never shall I forget the few minutes that evening, during which I had the honour to converse with the Sovereign, — in the somewhat strange, calm, small, soberly furnished, ordinary looking little salon whose entrance was so proudly guarded by these low-voiced military chiefs, and whose windows opened upon the distant uproar of a city *en fête*, beneath a sky alight with Bengal fires and the glow of a conflagration.

Certain that I should be understood and pardoned in the most charming and indulgent manner possible, I found courage to say how greatly

I regretted seeing the old things disappear, and mighty Istambul undergo such a transformation.

My complaint, however, from the artistic point of view, went no further; what I should have liked to add, I, a chance visitor, cannot permit myself to say in conversation with a sovereign, even when favoured with a most gracious audience.

What will become of this poor though mighty Turkey, so proud in the times when a nation's power was founded on faith, sublime ideals, and a noble personal courage? What will she do when inexorably drawn into the yawning vortex of modern vulgarity, and brought into contact with the thousand petty and mean, practical, and utilitarian aims and objects which once she scorned so whole-heartedly? Above all, what will become of her when her sons lose their faith?

Had I given expression to my profound attachment to this brave nation, I should have been tempted to show something of the sorrow and anxiety I felt, — to try to find out if the Caliph has caught a glimpse, beyond this frightful

transition period, of the mysterious dawning of a new era, the signs and portents of which my less practised eyes cannot yet distinguish.

THURSDAY, 15 May, 1890.

Morning, a bright early dawn.

I awake, not at Pera, in my own room, but in the heart of Istambul in one of those small inns where one sleeps, without undressing, on a white mattress spread over the floor.

As I left the Imperial palace very late last night, I called at my hotel to leave my gala suit, and hurried here, to mingle once more in the open-air festivities taking place on the other bank of the Golden Horn. Then, as the last few flickering lights of the Ramazan were dying out, I entered the nearest place I could find for a night's sleep.

No clock strikes the hour in this part of the city; consequently, on awaking, I was anxious to find out if I had slept too long, for an *aide-de-camp* of His Majesty was to call for me at my official address, to afford me an opportunity of visiting the Sultans' treasures.

On leaving the inn, life seemed all enchantment; even to breathe was a delight. The quiet little old streets light up joyously in the eternal sunshine, as though to prepare for some gay festival that is never to end. Oh! How rare and pure the life-giving freshness of this air and light on a May morning in the Orient! . . .

Reaching the Golden Horn, I soon find myself on the square, dotted with ancient plane-trees, overlooked on one side by the lofty grey mosque of the Valideh, with its minarets and arabesque denticulations. On the other sides there are vine bowers, small cafés, barbers' and *babouche* dealers' shops; everything very ancient and Oriental-looking, to all appearance quite indigenous to the place and such as one might find in Ispahan or Bagdad.

On this May morning, it is even more delightful on the square than in the streets. The rising sun gilds the mosque, and the fresh-looking plane-trees, from underneath; in the atmosphere hovers a white mist, the virginal veil of the day,

so to speak. The small Turkish cafés begin to open, and two or three men are already being shaved by the barbers, beneath the trees, in the open air.

Evidently it must be quite early, and I have time to loiter here before returning to Pera. I sit down in the shelter of a vine-arbour and order a café and a few little warm bonbons such as are here sold in the mornings to the worthy citizens. I enjoy it all far better than I should the most refined breakfast imaginable. One seems to feel rising within oneself that resurgence of life so manifest all around, giving a youthful aspect to everything.

A couple of hours later, about eight o'clock, a carriage again takes me back to Istambul, in a very different costume, and accompanied by one of His Majesty's *aides-de-camp*. We reach a solemn; deserted part of the city, with grass growing between the paving-stones in the streets, and here the coachman stops in front of a grim-looking enclosure, like that of a fortress of the Middle Ages.

These walls shut in a small corner of the earth

absolutely unique of its kind, an extreme projection of Oriental Europe, a promontory stretching out towards the neighbouring continent of Asia, and a building which, for centuries, was the residence of the Caliphs: a spot of incomparable splendour. Along with the holy suburb of Eyub, it is the most exquisite thing in Constantinople: the "Old Seraglio," the name alone of which summons up a whole world of dreams. . . .

A citadel door in the wall affords us access, whereupon the delicious melancholy of the things within is revealed; the dead past taking us to itself and enveloping us in its shroud.

At first, all is silence and shadow. The empty solitary courtyards with neglected grass sprouting between the flags and centennial trees raising aloft their leafy heads, contemporaries of the glorious Sultans of the past; dark cypresses rising upwards like towers, plane-trees that have assumed unwonted forms, hollow and eaten away by the ravages of time, bending forward like old men and held together only by huge strips of bark.

Then come galleries and colonnades, in ancient Turkish style; the verandah, still painted with odd-looking frescoes, beneath which Suleiman the Magnificent deigned to receive the ambassadors of the kings of Europe. . . . Fortunately this spot is but seldom accessible to the profane, it has not yet become a vulgar resort for tourists. Beyond its lofty walls it retains somewhat of its former mysterious peace, and bears the impress of the gloom and sadness of past splendour.

Passing through the first few courtyards, on our right we look upon impenetrable gardens, whence are seen to emerge, from between the clumps of cypresses, old kiosks with closed windows: these are the residences of Imperial widows and aged princesses who come to this austere retreat to end their days in full view of one of the most glorious sights the world affords.

The farthest part of this walled-in spot which we have now reached is exposed to the sun and blazing with light, it is the extreme point of the Old Seraglio and of Europe. This is a solitary esplanade, very high and white, dominating the blue expanse of sea, with azure in the distance.

The light morning sun floods with its rays these far-away deeps, where towns, islands, and mountains are daintily outlined above the still surface of the Sea of Marmora.

All around us are ancient constructions, also white, containing the rarest and most precious possessions of Turkey.

First, there is the kiosk, which none but the faithful are permitted to enter and where the mantle of the Prophet is preserved in a cover, embroidered with precious stones.

Then comes the kiosk of Bagdad, the interior of which is wholly adorned with articles of ancient Persian porcelain which are priceless nowadays: the branches of red flowers were made of coral — liquefied by a process now lost — which was spread over the porcelain like a picture.

Afterwards, we came to the Imperial Treasury, also very white beneath its layers of lime. It is barred and railed in like a prison, though its iron doors are shortly to open wide before me.

Finally we reach a palace — uninhabited, though kept in perfect order — in which we

are about to sit and rest. White marble steps bring us to the ground-floor salons which had to be furnished about the middle of the eighteenth century in the European fashion of that period. This is the Louis XV style to which a scarcely perceptible blend of Oriental fancy imparts a peculiar charm. . . . There are white and gold-coloured wainscotings, old-cherry or old-lilac flowered silks, all of light tints, softened by time. Large Chinese and Sèvres vases; very few objects, though every one ancient and rare. . . . Considerable space, air, and light; a quiet symmetry in the arrangement of things—which one instinctively feels are never removed from their places.

Here, in a kind of sumptuous solitude, seated in arm-chairs of a delicately pale pink colour, in front of the wide-open windows, we obtain, from this the extreme promontory of Europe, that glorious view which charmed the Sultans of by-gone ages. On the left, far beneath our feet, the Bosphorus rolls on, dotted with steamers and *caïques*; the white marble quays and the Imperial residences find inverted reflections of

themselves in long pale lines; and lines of mosques and palaces rise tier upon tier, in magnificent array, along its banks. Opposite is Asia, the last remnant of morning mist giving it a bluish tint; Scutari, with its domes and minarets, its immense cemetery and forest of gloomy-looking cypresses. To the right are the endless stretches of the Sea of Marmora: distant steamers almost lost in this diaphanous blue, like little grey silhouettes followed by long lines of smoke. . . .

How well chosen the place was for dominating and overlooking this land of Turkey, in its proud position on two of the world's continents! And now how peaceful, how sadly splendid this complete isolation from the modern life of the world, this profound silence expressive of abandonment beneath the light, dismal-looking sun! . . .

When the keeper of the Treasury — an old white-bearded man — makes ready to open the iron door with his great keys, a score of sworn individuals line the entrance, ten on each side — such are the demands of etiquette. We pass

along the double file and enter the rather dark rooms, followed by the rest.

No Ali-Baba's cave ever contained such wealth! Here, for eight centuries, have been stored the rarest of precious stones: the most astonishing marvels of art. Gradually, as our eyes grow accustomed to the dim light within after the glare of the sun, we see diamonds sparkling all around. Priceless objects, of unknown antiquity, are classed in order on shelf after shelf, along with weapons of every period, from Genghis Khan to Mahmud: all of silver or gold and sparkling with gems. There are collections of gold caskets of every style and size, some covered with rubies, others with diamonds, and others again with sapphires, some of the emeralds being as large as an ostrich egg. Coffee services, *buires*, and ewers, or jugs, of exquisite antique patterns, come next. Then we see the most dainty saddles and harness, state-switches for horses, ornamented with silver and gold brocade, embroidered over and over again with flower-shaped precious stones; extremely wide thrones, made for sitting in with crossed legs:

one all adorned with rubies and fine pearls, another entirely covered with emeralds and giving a green reflection as though a stream of seawater were pouring over it.

In the last room of all, behind glass windows, an immovable, terrifying company awaits us: twenty-eight death puppets, of the size of human beings, standing erect, in military file, and with elbows touching. They all wear that high pear-shaped turban which has been out of fashion for over a century and is never seen nowadays except on the catafalques of defunct persons of importance, in the dim light of funeral kiosks or else engraved on tombstones: to such an extent is this the case that it is inevitably connected, in my mind, with the idea of death. Up to the beginning of the nineteenth century, whenever a Sultan died, there was brought here a puppet, dressed in the gala garments of the deceased sovereign; marvellous weapons were fixed in its girdle, and on its head were set his turban and a magnificent *aigrette* of precious stones. Thus it remained for all time, covered with this eternally buried wealth. The

twenty-eight Sultans, who have succeeded one another from the capture of Constantinople to the end of the eighteenth century, have, in this room, their standing simulacra, in parade uniform; by slow degrees the sombre though sumptuous assembly has grown, the new puppets coming one by one to take their place in a line with the old ones which have been awaiting them for hundreds of years, certain that they would come at last. And all these phantoms are touching one another, figures that have reigned at centuries of intervals, though remorseless time has now brought them together in one and the same pitiable state of non-existence.

Their long robes are made of the strangest brocades, of large mysterious patterns, though time has destroyed their colour; priceless daggers, with wide pommels consisting of a single precious stone, in spite of every care, grow rusty in the silk of the girdles; it would even seem as though the enormous diamonds composing the aigrettes had, after the lapse of centuries, come to glow with a yellow and worn-out sort of brilliancy.

How sad to behold is all this unheard of luxury,

with its thin covering of dust. Of fabulous magnificence are the puppets with their lofty *coiffures*, objects of so much human covetousness, guarded there behind double iron doors, alike useless and dangerous. They witness the passing of years and centuries, kingdoms and revolutions, in the same immobility and silence; during the day, feeble rays of light finding their way through the old barred windows, and in utter darkness after sunset. . . . Each has its name, written on a faded label, like any ordinary word, — names still famous and in bygone days terrible to hear: Amurath the Conqueror, Suleiman the Magnificent, Mohammed and Mahmud. . . . I do not think there is anything that gives me a more awe-inspiring lesson on human vanity and frailty than do these puppets. . . .

Close by the Old Seraglio awaits a large *caïque* from the palace, with eight pairs of oars. Soon we are lying stretched on cushions, for this method of sailing in a half reclining posture, one's eyes almost on a level with the water over which one is gliding, is peculiar to Turkey.

All the rowers wear the traditional white silk gauze shirt, unbuttoned so as to expose their sun-burnt chests to the fresh air : impassive and swarthy, they have the appearance of bronze figures with ivory-white teeth.

The peaceful surface of the Bosphorus glitters beneath the ardent beams of the sun. Out in the open we pass steamers, the smoke of various craft, of everything that obstructs and defiles the sea opposite the Golden Horn.

In two or three places, we land on quays of immaculately white marble in front of deserted palaces with their white and gilded iron gates. This snowy whiteness alongside the blue water constitutes the great and unique charm of the Sultan's various residences.

There is much splendour and magnificence within these uninhabited palaces, whose doors are flung open by their keepers : forests of multi-coloured columns, a litter of candelabra and girandoles, extremely complicated ceilings in Oriental style, brocades worked with gold wire and Brusa silks. But not a soul in these state-

rooms, amid all this up-to-date and carefully preserved luxury. The Sovereign and his court no longer even visit them.

It is about noon when we return to the palace of Yildiz after this rapid visit to the other Imperial residences.

At Yildiz one receives an impression of utmost calm, peace, and silence. It is still the Ramazan, a time of seclusion and prayer, and in the dwelling of His Majesty the Sultan, even more than elsewhere, fasting is strictly practised during the whole of this religious month, nor must it be broken before sunset. Luncheon is served for myself alone, since I am not bound by the Mohammedan law; but I feel quite ashamed to find myself seated at table when no one else in the whole palace is eating: for the first time in my life, luncheon seems to me little more than an act of impropriety or indelicacy imported from the Occident.

Besides, I have something far better to do. On the gilt pages of a writing-pad brought by an interpreter, I am permitted to transfer some of my impressions to the Sovereign, whose near

presence one divines, though to-day he is not to be seen. And I admire the fact that His Majesty, amid the thousand engrossing occupations of a monarch's life, should interest himself in literature and art.

All is silent; through the open windows pour floods of light; sunbeams play on the white walls and light brocade of the furniture. In the foreground we have flower gardens, whilst far in the distance are those charming vistas of sea and continent which may be obtained from every part of this terrace-built city, the projecting balcony of Europe herself!

The Imperial mosque is also close by, with its dainty, slender dome. Smoking the most exquisite cigarettes, I chat about last night's religious music with His Excellency the Grand Vizier — who, when he pleases, can be the most courteous and refined Frenchman imaginable.

"Draw nearer to the window," he says, "and listen to the wonderful voice you will hear chanting the prayers, in a moment."

In effect, from out of the exterior peace and silence suddenly is heard a delightfully sonorous

voice. It has the thrilling sound of a hautbois combined with the celestial purity of a church organ ; as in dream or sleep, the voice sends forth the Mussulman prayer to the four corners of the blue heavens with a sort of inexpressive unconcern. . . . Then there comes over me an intense impression of all that Islam stands for, thrilling me to the very depths of my nature, an impression of infinite *melancholy*, at once soothing and torturing and which I have never been able clearly to define. I had gradually been losing it in this gay, light salon, which might well have been anywhere else, in a French *château*, for instance.

Even more beautiful than this golden voice, now thrilling with all the power of youth, but destined soon to pass away, is that almost immortal chant which, for centuries past, is heard five times each day in every town and village of Turkey. It symbolises an entire religion, a proud and tranquil mysticism ; it is an appealing plaint raised on high by our Oriental brothers, who are better able than ourselves to keep alive the old consoling dreams, who still go forward,

with closed eyes, that they may not see the abyss of dust and ashes yawning before them, and are lulled to sleep in glorious mirages of bliss. . . . So long as this prayer causes men to bow their heads around the mosques, Turkey will never lack the same valiant soldiers, ever careless of death. . . .

SERPENT CHARMERS

SERPENT CHARMERS



T was spring, the twilight of a May day, in T'etuan, the white city. Not a sound was to be heard. Over the terraces and the little old domes and houses spread the endless white stretch of lime; everywhere was this mysterious white shroud. Men slowly passed along, clad in garments of the most exquisite tints, in dreamy attitude; their dark and splendid oval eyes did not appear to behold the things of earth. The golden sunset cast a pink tint over all, and in the inmost recesses of the old and almost shapeless houses, the lime gradually assumed a blue colour somewhat like snow in the shade. There were passers-by dressed in golden yellow, pale green, and salmon colour, others in blue and pink, others who had chosen rarer and indescribable tints, all majestic and grave, with bronzed faces and intensely black eyes. Here

and there grew tufts of fresh spring plants, poppies, buttercups, mignonette, springing up all about, on the blue-white old walls. But it was the dead, ghastly white of the lime that dominated all; it seemed to give light and to refract it, sending it back in softer beams to the immense golden sky which now appeared all refulgent with the glow. Nowhere could be seen prominent shadows and outlines or sombre colours; the slowly moving living beings caused none but strangely clear and distinct tints, as pure and ethereal as one sees in heavenly visions, to pass over this universal whiteness; everything was fused and melted in tranquil light; those great, dreamy, human eyes were the only things that were black. . . .

A short distance away were heard the first faint notes of a flute, so sad and plaintive, and the muffled tambourine of the serpent charmers. Then the men, who had before been walking aimlessly in this white labyrinth, gradually directed their steps to the same spot, in response to the appeal of the music.

The charmers had placed themselves in the

centre of the public square, in the highest part of the town. In the blue distance could be seen a series of white lines, almost devoid of outline; these were terraces. There was also visible a succession of apparent snowdrifts, and these consisted of T'etuan itself, half buried in the May evening mist.

The men with their flowing robes formed a circle around the charmers. The latter, naked and tawny-hued, sang and danced like their own serpents, twisting and twining their supple busts to the music of their own flutes, the while shaking and tossing their curly locks. The whole scene was beautiful, from the sky above down to the humblest bronze-armed camel-driver, who looked on with vacant gaze, seeing nothing of what was taking place.

And there I was in their midst, taking no account of time, charmed like them, and, as it happened, resting a little amongst these motionless beings, heedless of the passing hours. And these sad-toned flutes and tambourines — along with the whole of this Africa — filled me with their soothing charm, with the same magic as

in bygone days, in my long-past youthful years. . . .

This land is indeed the one that still sings for me in sweetest strains the universal song of death.

A FEW FORGOTTEN PAGES OF
"MADAME CHRYSANTHÈME"

A FEW FORGOTTEN PAGES OF "MADAME CHRYSANTHÈME"

NAGASAKI, Sunday, 16th September, 1885.



THE previous evening I had made up my mind to go with Yves to the temple of "Taki-no-Kanon," a place of pilgrimage, at a distance of seven or eight leagues, out in the woods.

At ten o'clock in the morning, in already blazing sunshine, we started in jinrikishas, taking a relay of chosen runners, three for each of us, and also some fans.

We speedily left Nagasaki behind, rolling at a great pace up the green mountain, ascending all the time. At first, we went alongside a wide, deep torrent, from the bed of which there rose huge blocks of granite, like menhirs, some of them natural, others erected by human agency, and roughly carved to resemble gods; there they stood, amid the verdure and the raging stream,

like rocks or grey phantoms, with stumps of arms and rough-hewn faces. The Japanese cannot leave nature natural; even in its wildest aspects, they must give it a certain delicate fastidious refinement, or else impress on it a grimace or some horrible nightmare aspect. We roll on very quickly, jolted from one side to the other; our runners show no signs of fatigue, even up steep ascents, as we continue our course in winding zigzags.

The road is as smooth as our French roads, — and the presence of telegraph wires causes us no little astonishment amid these strange, unknown trees.

About noon, the sun now being hotter than ever, we halt at a tea-house, — a hospitable structure by the roadside, in a cool, shady corner of the mountain. There is a murmuring spring right in the house, seeming to issue, as though by miracle, from a bamboo vase, then it falls into a basin, in whose clear waters we see eggs, fruit, and flowers. We partake of rose-coloured water-melons that have been kept cool in the fountain, and taste like sherbet.

We are off again, and have now reached the top of the mountain-chain which surrounds Nagasaki like a wall. Soon we shall descry the country beyond. For the moment, we are traversing a lofty region, where everything is green, adorably green. The strident music of the grasshopper is heard on all sides; wide-winged butterflies flit about in the grass.

All the same, one feels that this is not the eternal warm, dull repose of a tropical country. It is the glory of summer, the summer of temperate climes; the more delicate verdure of annual plants that begin to sprout in spring; the litter of long, thin weeds and herbs which will die in autumn; the more ephemeral charm of a season like our own — the delicious languor of our European countries on a hot September afternoon. These forests, suspended, as it were, to the hill slopes, might in the distance be taken for those of Europe; one would say they were our own oaks, beeches, and chestnut-trees. And these small hamlets, with thatched or grey tiled roofs, appearing here and there, dotted about the valleys, do not seem out of their element; they

too look like those of our Western lands. There is nothing definite that is indicative of Japan, — these spots actually remind me of certain sunny sites among the Alps or in Savoy.

But on a close examination the plants fill one with wonder, for they are almost all unknown; the flitting butterflies are too large and too odd-looking; the very odours are different. Then, too, in these distant villages, one looks for a church or steeple, such as one might expect to find in Europe, but not a trace of such a building is anywhere to be seen. At the corners of the roads are neither crosses nor calvaries. Strange gods who have no connection with those of the Occident keep watch over the peaceful and silent slumber of this land. . . .

On reaching the highest peak of the first wall of mountains, we see opening out before us on the other side an immense plain like a green steppe, smooth as velvet, and in the distance a bay gently laved by tiny ripples.

Along winding paths we shall have to descend into this plain, our men inform us, and proceed

right across it; we must likewise traverse those hills that shut in the plain and form that far-off horizon.

This is somewhat startling, for we had never imagined the temple so far distant. . . . How will it be possible to return to-night?

Reaching the foot of the rapid winding path, we come to a halt in a wood of very lofty trees; in the shade stands an old granite temple, sullen and morose, dedicated to the god of rice. Seated on the altar are white foxes, in hieratical posture, showing their teeth with an evil snarl. Clear little streamlets babble beneath the trees, whose leaves are black and motionless.

A band of carriers, men and women, have also called a halt in this delightful spot, a very noisy and childish company, clad in wretched blue-cotton rags. Amongst them are some very pretty *mousmés* with sturdy limbs and bronzed complexions; they, too, are carriers by trade. They form a company of fifty at least, a human caravan, carrying bundles of goods and merchandise in baskets, at the end of long staves. Many similar caravans are also to be met with on the

roads of this island Kiushu, where neither horses nor carriages are seen, nor even railways, as in Nippon, the large civilised island of Japan.

After a rest, our djinns now roll us across the plain at a very rapid pace. They remove such garments as prove troublesome, one by one, and deposit them, all moist with sweat, beneath our feet in the small cars.

We are crossing an immense rice plantation beneath the full blaze of the midday sun in a cloudless sky. This plantation is perfectly level, of a soft, vernal colour, irrigated by thousands of invisible streams of running water ; all around us is a monotonous void, like the sky above our heads, and as green as the latter is blue.

The road is still a good one, and these amazing telegraph lines continue all the way, supported by posts, as in Europe. With this girdle of mountains in the distance, slightly veiled behind the haze of sunlight, one might imagine oneself in certain parts of Europe : on the smooth pasture-land of the plains of Lombardy, with the Alps

on the horizon. The only difference is that it is hotter here.

Our third halt is at the end of the steppe on the brink of a torrent. We take our seats in a tea-house at the entrance to a large village.

To refresh themselves, our djinns are served with plates of rice, cooked in water. This they eat with the help of sticks, and with quite feminine grace. The people troop around ; *mousmés*, in considerable numbers, inspect us with an air of polite and smiling curiosity. Very soon, all the babies in the place are also gathered together to look at us.

There is one of these yellow babies who fills us with pity, a dropsical child, with a pretty, gentle face. With both hands he holds his naked little paunch, all swollen, and which will certainly cause his speedy death.

We give him a few copper coins, and receive in return a smile of joy and a look of deep gratitude from this poor little thing who will never see us again and will surely before long be gathered into Japanese earth.

The huts of this village are like those at Naga-

saki, built of wood and paper, with similar mats, all extremely clean. . . . Along the main street are shops in which are sold various amusing little things, along with numbers of plates, cups, and tea-pots; but instead of the coarse pottery found in the villages at home, everything here is of fine porcelain, ornamented with pretty and delicate designs.

We cross another range of hills, on a lower level, and reach another plain. Here, too, we find rice plantations, along with ditches full of reeds and lotus-blooms. Our djinns, who have come to the end of their progressive unrobing, are now quite nude. Perspiration is streaming down their tawny skins. One of my men, who comes from the province of Owari, renowned for its tattooers, has his body literally covered with designs of the most refined though uncouth nature. On his shoulders, of a uniformly blue colour, is a garland of peonies of dazzling pink, exquisitely designed. A lady, in an ostentatious costume, occupies the middle of his back; the embroidered garments of this odd-looking person, descend along his loins down to his sinewy thighs.

By the side of another torrent our djinns come to a halt; they are a little out of breath, so they beg us to dismount. The road is no longer good for carriages; we have to ford the stream on stones and continue on foot along paths which will soon bury themselves in mountain and forests.

One of them stays behind to take charge of the jinrikishas; the rest accompany us as guides.

We soon find ourselves climbing amongst rocks and roots and ferns along the tiny forest paths, beneath the dense shade of the trees. Here and there we pass an old granite idol, shapeless, wasted away by time, and moss-covered, reminding us that we are approaching a sanctuary. . . .

. . . I feel quite incapable of expressing that poignant, unexpected feeling which memory suddenly brings back to me along these shady paths. This verdant night, with the huge trees overhead, these ferns all too large, this odour of mosses, and in front of me these copper-coloured men: everything suddenly wafts me through time and space back to Oceania, to the great woods of Fatou-hiva, with which I was once so familiar.

. . . . I have wandered in different countries throughout the world since my departure from Tahiti — *the isle of delight* — and have frequently experienced these painful memories, coming upon me like a lightning flash, and immediately vanishing, leaving behind nothing but a vague feeling of anguish, equally fleeting. . . .

The tumult, however, aroused within me at the memory of that indescribable charm possessed by Polynesia, is localised in the profoundest recesses of my being, perhaps previous to my present existence. When I attempt to speak of it, I feel I am entering upon an order of things, misty and dark, scarcely comprehensible even by myself. . . .

Farther on, in a higher region of the mountain, we plunge into a forest of cryptomerias, or Japan cedars. The foliage is thin and scanty, it is dark-coloured; the trees are so crowded together and high, so slender and upright, that they might almost be taken for a field of gigantic reeds. An ice-cold stream flows beneath the forest shade, roaring and rattling along in a bed of grey stones. .

Finally, there appear steps in front of us; then a portico, all shapeless from the ravages of time, leading into a kind of court shut in between rocks and covered with straggling weeds. In this court, monolithic gods, with towering head-gear and faces spotted with moss, are seated in rows, as though holding council together.

Afterwards comes a second portico, made of cedar, odd-cornered and complicated in form. To right and left, each in his iron-barred cage, are the two inevitable guardians of every temple entrance: the blue and the red monster, still seeming to make feeble attempts to threaten with their old worm-eaten arms, to terrify with decrepit gestures of fury. They are pierced all over with prayers on *papier mâché*, left by passing pilgrims; they have them on the body and face and in their very eyes, a horrible sight.

The second court, still more shut in, presents an aspect of ruin and neglect, like the former. It is a gloomy solitary kind of yard, containing granite gods and tombs; immediately on entering there is heard the splashing of an invisible

cascade, the gushing and roaring of subterranean water, as it were. The faithful visit this temple only at certain times of the year, the result being that the grass has plenty of time to invade the stone flags. There also grow long slender cycads, raising aloft, as high as they can, towards the sun, their tufts of green plumes. At the farther end stands the temple, with vertical rocks overhanging, covered with lianas and roots, all entangled together.

In China, Anam, and Japan, it is the custom to conceal temples in all kinds of places: in the depths of a forest, in obscure deep valleys, or even in a dark greenish-looking cavern, or else to perch them boldly on the solitary peaks of the loftiest mountains. The inhabitants of farthest Asia think that the gods delight in unexpected and rare sites.

The entrance to the sanctuary is closed, but through the bars of the door there can be seen shining inside a number of gilded idols quietly seated on old red-lacquered seats.

There is nothing very special about this

pagoda in itself, it resembles any other one would meet out in the country, in Japan. What is strange is the position it occupies; almost immediately behind, the valley comes to a sudden termination, shut in by a precipitous mountain, and into the recess between its walls and the steep sides around falls the cascade I have just heard, with mighty eternal crash. There is a kind of sinister-looking basin, an infernal abyss, where the wheat sheaf jet, falling from on high into the void, hisses and rages, all white with foam, between the black rocks.

Our runners plunge eagerly into this ice-cold bath; they dive and swim about, uttering little childlike cries, as they sport beneath the enormous *douche*. Thereupon, we also, unable to resist the temptation, fling off our garments and follow their example.

Whilst resting afterwards on the stones by the edge, delightfully refreshed by the cold water, we receive an unexpected visit: the bonze and his wife, — for all the world resembling two poor old apes, — who issue from the

temple by a little side door, and have come to pay us their respects.

At our request, they prepare for us a sort of doll's dinner, in their own way; this consists of rice and scarcely perceptible fishes, caught in the cascade. This repast is served in dainty blue cups, on pretty lacquered trays. We share it with our djinns, all sitting together in front of the rushing stream, amid the mist and spray.

"What a distance we are from the old country!" exclaimed Yves suddenly, in dreamy tones.

Yes, indeed; there can be no doubt of that; and the remark at first appears as self-evident and profound as those made by La Palisse in his day. I understand, however, why he gave expression to this sentiment, for the same thought had entered my mind. There can be no doubt that in this spot we are a great deal farther away from France than we were this morning on board the *Triomphante*. Whilst one is on his own ship, that travelling house he has brought with him, he is surrounded by the faces of his

own countrymen, by all the customs and habits of his land, and this deludes him. Even in the large towns, — Nagasaki, for instance, — where there are steamers, sailors, and all the stir of life, one has no very clear notion of these great distances. No, it is rather in the calm of some such isolated spot as this, especially when the sun is going down as it is just now, that one feels oneself a frightful distance away from home.

Scarcely an hour's rest before it is time to start on our return journey. The djinns have renewed their strength as a result of the cold bath, and they speed along faster than ever, leaping and bounding like goats and shaking us considerably in our tiny cars.

Back again over the same plains and rice plantations, across the same streams and villages, more dull and gloomy looking, when seen in the twilight. Thousands of grey crabs, that have left their holes to enjoy the evening freshness, flee before us as we advance.

At the foot of the last mountain range sep-

arating us from Nagasaki, we light our lanterns, for night has now overtaken us.

Our runners, still nude and indefatigable, speed rapidly along, shouting and calling aloud to encourage one another.

It is a peaceful, warm night, with innumerable shining stars above, and scarcely perceptible tiny lights below: glow-worms hidden in the grass, and fire-flies fluttering about amongst the bamboos like sparks. Naturally, the grasshoppers join in a mighty nocturnal chorus, and the noise grows louder and louder, the higher we rise into the woodland regions around Nagasaki. All these masses of green, these apparently suspended woods which were of such a dazzling colour during the day, now form patches of intense black; some hanging over our heads, the rest lost in the depths beneath our feet.

We frequently come across groups of travellers: modest wayfarers on foot or people of rank or importance in jinrikishas; all are carrying, at the end of sticks, road lanterns consisting of great white or red balloons, daubed over with flowers and birds. The fact is that the road on

which we are served as the chief means of communication with the interior of the island of Kiushu, and even at nighttime is much frequented; both above and below, along the dark, winding paths, we see many of these multi-coloured lights quivering and flickering through the branches of the trees.

About eleven o'clock, we chance to make another halt, high on the mountain, at a tea-house: a dismal old inn, doubtless used by labourers and carriers. The people of the place, though half asleep, relight their tiny lamps and stoves to make tea for us.

This they serve under the verandah in the fresh air, the stars shining in the blue-black expanse of sky.

Yves again begins to give us those childlike impressions of "being so far from home," which came over him a few hours ago: "One feels quite lost here," he remarks. Then he reflects that the sun, which has passed from view a few minutes ago, has just risen on Trémouléen-Toulven, and that to-day happens to be the

second Sunday in September, the anniversary of the great *pardon* at which we were both present last year, listening to the cornemuse in the oak forests. . . . What changes have taken place since that *pardon*, a year ago. . . .

It is after midnight when we return to Nagasaki; but as there is a religious festival at the pagoda of Osueva, the tea-houses are still crowded and the roads lit.

At home, Chrysanthème and Oyouki await us, in dozing attitude.

In the blue basin, out on Madame Prune's roof, we place a handful of rare ferns, gathered away in the forest, and then sink into deep sleep beneath our gauze mosquito-nets.

JAPANESE WOMEN IN 1890

JAPANESE WOMEN IN 1890



THOUGHT I had said my last word on everything Japanese, — and now I find I have been prevailed upon to promise a few words on the subject of that mysterious little ornamental *biblot*, the Japanese woman. So once again I surround myself with everything capable of reviving my memories of that delightful land; memories that have not yet faded away into the dim past to such an extent that I cannot regain the illusion of actual reality: robes fragrant with Japanese perfumes, vases, fans, pictures, and portraits. The latter more especially, innumerable portraits scattered all about my work-table, smiling faces of *mous-mès* both known and unknown to me; small eyes drawn up to the temples, little cat's eyes. . . . And their attitudes and the dresses they wore! . . . All the roguish archness, all that strange

studied grace seen in the folds of flowing tunics or sheltering beneath the extravagant motley tints of sunshades. And the illusion after which I am seeking comes over me so completely, that there seems to issue from these open albums a gentle murmur of low voices; in the silence around, I hear the ripple of light laughter, as it were. . . .

I do not believe that a European can write anything absolutely correct or exact about the Japanese woman, if he insists on investigating beneath the surface of things. Only a Japanese could do this, or, perhaps, *à la rigueur*, a Chinese, for between these two nations, though so different from each other, there exist the most undeniable affinities of soul. Still, even if his study of his own womankind went just a little too deep, it would lose all meaning for us; it would teach us nothing, for a certain aspect would elude our grasp, and that very aspect would be the one of profoundest significance. The yellow race and our own are the two opposite poles of the human species; there exists the

widest difference even in our ways of perceiving external objects, whereas our ideas on things in their essence are frequently the reverse of each other. We can never fully penetrate the mind of a Japanese or a Chinese; there suddenly comes a time when, with mingled feelings of terror and mystery, we find ourselves checked by intellectual barriers beyond which we cannot pass; these nations feel and think the very opposite from ourselves.

Consequently what I am about to say now will be very superficial, and from the outset I prefer to state frankly that it would be impossible for my description to be anything else. . . .

Very plain-looking are these poor little Japanese women! I will say this from the beginning, in all its brutality, for later on I shall mitigate this impression by speaking of their mincing daintiness and graceful drollery, of their adorable little hands, and, finally, of *poudre de riz*, of the pink and gold spread on the lips, and of artifices of every kind.

Scarcely any eyes at all—nothing worth mentioning; two thin, slanting, divergent slits,

deep sunk, in which roll a pair of cunning or wheedling eyeballs, — such as may be seen between the half-open eyelids of a tabby, which cannot endure the full glare of daylight.

Above these little curbed eyes — high, high above them — appear the eyebrows, delicate as the lines of an artist's brush, and not curled in the slightest, or parallel to the eyes, — to which they form so bad an accompaniment, — but each in a straight line, quite in contradistinction from the conventional European representation of a Japanese woman.

In my opinion, the entire peculiarity and oddity about these little faces lies in this arrangement of the eyes, which never varies, and also in the form of the cheek, which grows as round as that of a doll; in their paintings, moreover, the artists of the country are always careful to reproduce these characteristic signs of their race, even going so far as to exaggerate them to the most improbable dimensions.

The other features change to a far greater extent; first, in individuals themselves, but more especially in the various social ranks.

Among the masses, the lips remain large, the nose flat and short; in the nobility, the mouth becomes thinner and the nose long and sharp, sometimes even bending into a dainty aquiline shape.

There is no country in the world in which feminine types form such distinct contrasts between the different castes. Dark peasant women as bronzed as Hindus, with tiny, dainty, well-dressed figures, their limbs plump and muscular beneath their eternal blue cotton dresses. Languishing diminutive townswomen, white and pallid as unhealthy Europeans, with that something furrowed and worn away, so to speak, in the very flesh itself, which is indicative of too old a race. And all the artisan women in the large towns seem as though they have been hereditarily worn out, used up even before birth by too long and continuous labour, their minds ever directed on the most minute details of things; one might say that on their tiny frail forms weighs all the toil and fatigue of having produced, century after century, those millions of *bibelots*, those innumerable little

works that demand inexhaustible patience, with which Japan is overflowing. Lastly, in the princesses, aristocratic refinement, going back into the remote past, has come to form astonishing little artificial persons, with the hands and bodies of children, and whose painted faces, more pink and white than a fresh *bonbon*, give no indication of their age; in their smile there is a distant expression such as one sees in the smile of an old idol, whilst the reserved look in their eyes may be described as both youthful and dead at the same time.

Then, again, high above all other Japanese women, hovered the invisible Empress like a goddess, even quite recently. The sovereign, however, has gradually descended from her empyrean; nowadays she shows herself, receives visitors, speaks, and even lunches — though only her thin lips appear to move. She has abandoned her magnificent camails, adorned with strange coats of arms, her wide idol *coiffure* and huge fans; and, alas! she orders her corsets, dresses, and hats from Paris or London.

On one of the rare and solemn occasions on which a few privileged individuals were admitted into her presence, I had the honour of seeing her in her gardens. She was ideally charming, passing like a fairy to and fro amid her flowerbeds, filled with drooping autumn blooms, and then taking her seat beneath the dais of violet *crépon* (the Imperial colour), in all the stately rigidity of her multicoloured robes, varied as the plumage of a humming-bird. The delightfully odd show and display with which she still surrounded herself invested her with all the charm of some unreal being. On her painted lips was a forced smile, vague and disdainful. Her delicate powdered face wore an inscrutable expression; in spite of her gracious welcome, we felt that our presence offended her, and that it was nothing but the changed modern customs which compelled her, the sacred Empress, once invisible and unapproachable, as a religious myth, to tolerate us!

All this is now at an end: the wonderful dresses that have remained unchanged in form and style for hundreds of years, the lovely gor-

geous fans are now relegated for ever to wardrobes and museums. The modern levelling process has suddenly descended upon the Mikado's court, which had hitherto been more sacred than a cloister, and had retained, from time immemorial, its unchanging elegance and costumes, its rites and ceremonies.

The word of command has been given from above; an edict of the Emperor has ordained that the ladies of the palace shall dress like their sisters in Europe; in feverish haste, models and sempstresses, silks and hats, have been sent for. The first attempts made to wear all these travesties must have taken place in private, perhaps accompanied with regrets and tears, who knows, though more probably with jesting and laughter. Then foreigners were invited to come and see them; garden parties, dances, and concerts were organised. The Japanese ladies who had had the opportunity of travelling in Europe in embassies set the tone to this astonishing comedy, so quickly adopted. The first few balls — European style — given in Tokio were extremely clever feats of mimicry; there were

present young ladies dressed all in white muslin, with gloves reaching above the elbow. They were seated on chairs, and assumed mincing, affected manners, as they toyed with their programmes. Then they danced polkas and waltzes in tolerably good time, to the tune of operetta music, notwithstanding the enormous difficulties all our unknown European rhythms and measures must have had for them. Wines, chocolates, and ices were passed round, and dainty little hands took from the trays, with the most charming grace, these refreshments, which had before never even been tasted. Then there were "cotillon rounds," supper, and a certain amount of discreet flirting.

All this servile imitation, amusing enough to passing strangers, really points, at bottom, to a want of taste in this people; it even indicates an utter lack of national dignity; no European race would ever consent to throw overboard in this fashion, at a minute's notice, its age-long traditions and customs, even in obedience to the formal commands of an Emperor.

Thank Heaven, the new feminine masquerade

is still restricted to a very small circle: to none but the Court and the official world at Tokio. All these little persons, princesses, duchesses, or marchionesses, — the old Japanese titles of nobility have also been changed into their European equivalents! — who almost succeeded in being charming in their sumptuous attire and finery of bygone ages, are now frankly ugly in these new dresses, which but accentuate in our eyes their excessively affected figures, Asiatic flatness of profile, and oblique vision. For the most part, they still retain an air of distinction; though absurdly dressed, odd and ridiculous frights, they are scarcely ever common-looking. Beneath the *gaucherie* of the new customs with which they have scarcely made acquaintance so far, beneath the new attitudes — acquired with so much difficulty — imposed by corset and whalebone busk, a certain aristocratic refinement still persists, though, as a matter of fact, that is all they have left to constitute their charm.

It is in this mad and outrageous transition period that the *grande dame* of Japan appears

before us. The world of princesses, with their scarce visible, dead-looking little eyes, their spreading *coiffures* pierced with hair-pins of the most extravagant size, — this world which, up to recent years, had disdained to be seen by Occidental eyes, suddenly lies unfolded before our gaze. By some unexplained change, a world which seemed to have become mummified in ancient rites and customs has in a day shaken off its mysterious immobility. Still, it is under a somewhat disconcerting aspect that we see these women dress like the most modern of our own race, and, with infinite grace, receive their visitors in imitation European salons. Nor must the fact be lost sight of that all this is artificial and on the surface, arranged for our special benefit; we are altogether ignorant of what is taking place behind those controlled countenances; consequently, there is no reason why we should hasten to smile and regard as insignificant these singular, flat-profiled, doll-like faces. After this mystifying performance, they certainly leave their dreadfully ugly gilt arm-chairs, their new suites of rooms in the worst

possible Occidental taste, and — who knows — perhaps dressing themselves in the gorgeous emblazoned robes of the past, they go and squat down on their white mats in one of those small, dismountable, paper-framed compartments, of which the traditional Japanese house is composed; and then, looking with their scarce open eyes at the dainty gardens in the distance, made up of dwarf trees, small sheets of water and tiny rocks, they become themselves once again — and there is nothing more to relate. Then, how do they live in the *coulisses* of their own homes, of what do they dream in the even more walled-in *coulisses* of their own minds? This is the riddle so hard to guess. In these palish heads with their long, straight hair, these strange sickly looking heads, are little brains, fashioned and moulded just the reverse of ours by a whole heredity of difference in culture; they contain ideas unintelligible to us regarding religion, death, and the mystery of life.

Do these women continue to write exquisitely melancholy poems on flowers and cool-flowing streams and forest shades as in the good old

days? Do they, maybe, resemble those ancestors of theirs, heroines of the poems and legends of chivalry, who held such lofty ideals of honour and love? . . . I cannot answer, though, in my opinion, one would be very thoughtless to judge them by that eternal stupidly simple smile they give us; moreover, I have often caught a most intense expression on these women's faces; on that of the Empress, for instance, on two or three occasions, I remember seeing flashes of interest and intelligence appear; her pretty carmine-painted lips quivered, and her little aquiline nose became more pointed than ever.

The woman *comme il faut* who has not yet become Europeanized may still be found, far from Tokio and the Court, in the other towns of the Empire. She has not given up her old finery. You may see her in a jinrikisha or small hand carriage, always very simply dressed in the streets; she wears, one over the other, three or four plain, sombre or neutral-tinted dresses, of fine pale silk. In the middle of her back, a small white daintily embroidered rosette

represents her family coat of arms; her hair, smoothed and combed to an incredible state of perfection, is held up with plain tortoise-shell pins devoid of gold ornaments or precious stones. When she grows old, and strictly conforms to the traditional fashion, her eyebrows are shaved and her teeth covered over with a coating of black lake. She is of a more retiring disposition, more difficult to tame, than the ordinary *bourgeoise*, but if you insist, you may obtain from her a charming smile or a bow, accompanied by some polite commonplace remark or other: nothing more.

And after all, you know her almost as well, after this simple experience, as you know the rest, the fashionable ladies belonging to the newly formed strata of society, with whom you may have danced a cotillon or a Strauss waltz at a State ball. Consequently, if you are asked to describe the Japanese *grande dame*, the wisest course is to declare that, so far, she is a perfect enigma.

The *bourgeoises*, the women who belong to the trading and artisan classes, may everywhere

be seen without difficulty; intimacy with them is so speedily acquired that an attempt may be made to speak of them at greater length, even though it be impossible to divine their inmost nature. The general impression I have retained of these thousands of little creatures one meets with everywhere — in tea-house, theatre, and pagoda — is an absolute lack of seriousness. It is impossible for me to refrain from an involuntary smile whenever I think of them.

My memory recalls crowds of amazing little figures, eager and excited, somewhat apelike, continually on the move and bowing to everybody. They are surrounded by tiny dolls' *bibelots* in diminutive rooms, the paper walls of which would give way to the slightest blow of a man's fist. Women in miniature, at once childish and oldish, whose excessive grace is affected and simpering to the point of becoming a sheer grimace, whilst their never ceasing laughter — both contagious and devoid of gaiety — is as irresistible as a tickling sensation and in the long run produces the same provoking lassitude. They laugh from excessive amiability or as the

result of acquired habit; they laugh in the most solemn and grave circumstances of life; they even laugh in the temples or at a funeral.

Very tiny creatures they are, living amidst very tiny objects, as delicate and finical as themselves. Their household utensils, of dainty china-ware or thin metal, resemble children's toys; their cups and tea-pots are quite Liliputian, and their eternal pipes may be filled with a mere pinch of finely shredded tobacco, picked up with the tips of their elegant little fingers.

Never seated, but squatting on the ground, all day long, on immaculate white mats, they perform almost all the actions of their life in this unchanging posture; their little dinners are served on the ground in microscopic plates and dishes and daintily eaten with chopsticks; on the ground they go through their toilet in front of ridiculously small mirrors, behind fragile-looking screens scarcely large enough to conceal them, and surrounded by a litter of funny little instruments, tiny pots, and powder-boxes; on the ground, too, they work, sew and embroider, play on their long-necked guitars, dream of im-

possibilities, or address long morning and evening prayers to their inscrutable gods.

Needless to relate, the small houses in which they dwell are as elaborate and finical as themselves; they are almost invariably easy to manage, with partitions that can be removed, drawers and compartments of all shapes, and wonderful little cupboards. Everything is minutely clean, even in the houses of the poorest; everything, also, is of the utmost simplicity, especially in the houses of the wealthy. The ancestral altar alone, on which incense burns, is slightly gilt and lacquered, adorned, like a pagoda, with china vases and lanterns; everywhere else is intentional bareness, a bareness which is only the more complete and white, the more elegant the dwelling happens to be. Embroidered hangings will be found nowhere, though sometimes there are transparent falling curtains, composed of stringed pearls and reeds. Nor is there any more furniture; the usual necessary objects and the flower vases stand either on the ground or on small lacquered pedestals. The mistress of the house considers that the luxury of her home

consists in the very excess of that virtue of cleanliness of which I spoke a short time ago: one of the undoubted qualities of the Japanese as a race. It is a universal custom to remove one's foot-gear before entering a house; immaculate is the whiteness of the mats, on which no one ever steps except in dainty socks; immaculate, too, the whiteness of the plain paper with which walls and ceiling are covered. The very wood-work is white, it is neither painted nor varnished over; its only ornament, in the opinion of women with real claims to taste, consists of its scarcely perceptible veinings of new deal. More than one fine lady have I seen personally superintending her comical little servants as they soaped and scrubbed this woodwork, with might and main, to give it quite a fresh appearance, as though it had just left the carpenter's bench.

In our own lands, whenever mention is made of Japanese women, we at once think of persons wearing dazzling, bright-coloured dresses such as they send across to us; dresses of soft, indescribable shades, embroidered with long-stalked flowers, large chimeras and fantastic

birds. Such is not the case: dresses of this description are reserved for the theatre, or are worn by a certain class of women, who live in a special part of the city, and of whom I cannot speak here. Japanese women all dress in dark shades, they wear cotton or woollen stuffs, generally of a plain, uniform pattern, or dotted with dainty little cloudy designs, whose equally dark tints scarcely differ from the background itself. Marine blue is the predominating shade: to such an extent is this the case that a feminine crowd, even in holiday garb, seems, at a distance, one mass of very dark blue, a swarm of one and the same colour, relieved only here and there by a few dazzling reds or fresh-looking tints worn by babies or tiny little girls.

The form of these dresses is well known; they may be seen painted or sketched in all the Japanese pictures and illustrations with which we are inundated. The wide, flowing sleeves leave free the slightly amber-coloured arms, which are generally well shaped, whilst the hands are invariably pretty. The dress is completed by a broad sash, called an *obi*, usually made of the

finest silk ; the regular looped bows, resembling some monster butterfly on the delicate little backs, and giving that particular grace to a feminine outline, which is so much sought after. Our dull-coloured silk sunshades, in the case of certain fashionable ladies, are beginning to replace the charming painted parasols of the past, on which pleasing thoughts from the poets of old were often introduced between pictures of flowers and birds. Our foot-gear has not yet been adopted in Tokio, in important official circles ; everywhere else the ancient sandal is worn. This is fastened between the great toe and the rest, and is deposited in the hall, just as we do in the case of walking-sticks and hats. Sandals obstruct the entrances of fashionable tea-houses, and may be seen piled upon one another on the outer steps of the pagodas when important religious ceremonies are taking place. In rainy weather, when going out into the streets, they put on, over the sandals, a kind of clog whose excessively high wooden pattens make a loud clatter on the pavement, as they hurry along, with dresses tucked up. No European woman could

walk half a dozen yards in such foot-gear without falling. These ladies, moreover, walk with heels turned outwards — such being the fashion — and loins slightly forward: doubtless the outcome of an hereditary abuse of the custom of bowing.

Their head-dress also is well known to the whole world; with two or three strokes of the brush the Japanese artists show it in all its various aspects, or caricature it with rare skill. What, however, is perhaps not so well known, is that the women, even those with pretensions to the best taste, have their hair combed only two or three times each week; their *chignons* and bands are so firmly set up by specialists in this particular style of *coiffure* that they will remain for several days, if need be, without losing their perfect smoothness or vivid lustre. It must, however, be mentioned that ladies invariably sleep on their backs, without a pillow, the head touching nothing whatsoever and sustained by a kind of small lacquered easel which fits into the nape of the neck, — all this so that the hair may not become disarranged during the night.

I had also forgotten to state that they sleep on the ground on such tiny mattresses that in our country they would be taken for small quilts or foot-coverings. By the way, at nighttime, they are always very chastely dressed in long and invariably blue nightgowns, whilst small, unobtrusive lamps, veiled behind paper frames, ever keep watch over their dreams, and serve to dispel any evil spirits of darkness which may be hovering in the air about these tiny houses of thin wood.

In Japan, the poorer women and those of the lower middle class share in almost every kind of work carried on by the men. They are skilled in business and know how to make a bargain; they cultivate the soil, and sell their produce; they work in the mills; they even work as street porters.

In early youth, if they happen to be pretty, they frequently leave home and enter into service in tea-houses and inns, as smiling and attractive little soubrettes. There, for a time, they go to swell the numbers of those thousands

of *mousmés*, whose destiny it is to amuse and attend to the wants of customers wherever rest or pleasure or drink is in request. In fact, it almost seems as though Japan would lose its *raison d'être* were it not for the *mousmé*. The *mousmés* are countless as the sands on the sea-shore; indeed, you might almost think there were only one, multiplied *ad infinitum*, with the same invariably blue dress cut very low in front, the same dainty laugh, the same little coquettish ways and mannerisms, always gay and charming, ready for any amusement. Not only is she seen in great numbers in towns and cities, behind the thin paper partitions of restaurants and inns; but even out in the open country, wherever any particularly attractive site is encountered, you are sure to come across a tea-house cosily nestling amid the trees, and if you enter, it is once more the *mousmé* — always the same, always smiling — who greets you. She is quite as artful here in the country as in the main thoroughfares of Nagasaki or Tokio. Notwithstanding her utter lack of beauty, the *mousmé* is often extremely pleasant and nice, for she

is very gay and young ; once she has passed her prime, no one would tolerate her for a moment ; her ephemeral grace would immediately be converted into an apish grimace. As a rule, however, she retires before she is out of her teens, returns to the bosom of her family, and takes a husband, one who is perfectly resigned and willing to shut his eyes to all the little flirtations and romances she has passed through in former days. . . . Besides, in Japan, nothing is of much consequence ; nothing is very serious, neither in the past, nor, *à la rigueur*, in the present. . . . And there is such a spirit of drollery cast upon everything, such amusing *bonhomie* shown by all, that one feels much less shocked in that country than anywhere else, even by the most inadmissible acts. In these tiny persons there is an indescribable blend of cunning trickery and childish innocence and unconsciousness, which causes one to pardon them with a smile and feel almost disposed to see something charming in their little lapses and peccadilloes. . . .

They are even devoid of our elementary ideas

as to the impropriety of appearing unclothed ; they dress themselves because clothes are pretty and artistic, and because they keep one warm in winter. But whenever it is necessary to disrobe, — on taking a bath, for instance, — that does not annoy them to any great extent. Irreproachably clean, they bathe a great deal, though without making the slightest mystery of the performance ; in Nagasaki, a town far less Europeanized than Yokohama or Kobe, the large round tubs which serve as baths are carried about anywhere, in the tiny gardens, for instance, within sight of the neighbours, with whom they chat away during their ablutions ; or, in the case of tradeswomen, in the very shops and stores, without there being the faintest thought of shutting the door upon the customers in consequence.

All the same, it would not be right to look upon them as devoid of moral sense, or even as being faithless to their husbands : here, too, there are a host of things we do not understand, innumerable shades of difference in conduct very difficult to grasp, but more especially dan-

gerous to interfere with. . . . There! I have been asked to write what may be read by everybody, on the subject of the women of Japan, and so I am forced to leave the question of their morals quite untouched.

There can be no doubt, however, that they have a strong family sentiment, that they tenderly love their children, and hold their ancestors, both living and dead, in the greatest respect. They are admirable mothers and grandmothers; it is delightful to see how gentle and devoted they are in their care of the little ones, even in the lowest classes of the people, — the affectionate intelligence they show in amusing them and inventing for them the most wonderful toys.

And with how perfect an art, with what intuition of childish drollery and profound knowledge of what is becoming to the tiny faces, do they dress them in the most delightfully absurd little gowns, tie up their hair in extraordinary *chignons*, and, in a word, turn them into the most exquisitely comical babies imaginable!

Besides this, they are devoted elder *sisters*; at any time you may see little girls of eight or

ten, far away from home, enjoying a stroll or a game, with a scarce weaned brother whom they keep amused in the gentlest manner possible, fastened to their back with a band tied round the waist.

To take another line of thought, I knew two sisters, poor orphan girls, who, in order to contribute towards the superior education of a younger brother, the glory of the family, had contracted a morganatic marriage with a rich old man, and willingly deprived themselves, on behalf of the young student, of all personal comfort in life.

I do not know if Japanese women are altogether good and kind-hearted ; at all events, they are neither ill-natured, rude, nor quarrelsome. Moreover, their politeness cannot fail to be anything else than an invariable quantity, for the Japanese language does not contain a single insulting word, and even amongst fish dealers and street porters, only the most polite and dignified expressions are used.

I once saw two poor old women on the beach,

gathering pieces of coal that had been washed ashore, and going through endless ceremonies as to which of the two should take some disputed lump; then a most unexpected series of bows and compliments followed, just as though they had been marchionesses of the old *régime*.

Notwithstanding their very real frivolity and their continual silly laughter, in spite of the fact that they resemble dolls worked with springs, it would be quite unfair to give the impression that all loftiness of thought is lacking in them; they have the sentiment of the poetry of things, of the mighty and vague soul of nature, of the charm of flowers, of woods and forests, of silence and moonbeams. . . . All this they tell in rather affected verse which possesses the grace of the foliage and reeds — at once very natural and very improbable — which we find painted on silk and lacquer-work.

In a word, they resemble the art products of their own country, *bibelots* of the utmost refinement, but which it is prudent to sort out and scrutinise very carefully before sending them to Europe, lest some obscenity or other lie hidden

behind a bamboo stem or beneath a sacred stork. They may likewise be compared with those Japanese fans which, when opened from right to left, represent the sweetest nosegays imaginable; whereas when opened in the other direction, from left to right, scenes of the most revolting indecency are shown.

Their music, of which they are passionately fond, is to us something strange and far-away, like the soul of this people. When young girls meet together in the evenings to sing and play on their long-necked guitars, after the first smile of astonishment there comes over us the impression of something quite unknown and strange, something very mysterious, which years of intellectual acclimation would never succeed in making us fully understand.

Their religion, too, must seem very complicated and vague to their frivolous little brains, when even the most learned priests of the land lose themselves in the symbols and cosmogonies, the metamorphoses of the gods and the millennial chaos on which Indian Buddhism has

become grafted in so strange a fashion, without destroying anything.

Their most serious cult appears to be that of ancestral worship. The manes or lares, in every family, have a perfumed altar of their own, before which long prayers are recited, morning and evening, without there being any absolute belief, however, in the immortality of the soul or in the persistence of the human "I" as understood in our Western religions. The dead, almost unconscious themselves of their own survival as spirits, hover about in a kind of neutral state, between an aerial condition and a state of non-existence. All around these ancient little houses of wood and paper, which have witnessed a succession of pious generations and whose ancestral altars are black with the smoke of incense, there forms itself in the air, after a time, an impersonal *ensemble* of anterior souls; something like an *ancestral fluid*, which looks down upon the living and keeps watch over them. Here, too, our understanding is limited; in the prevailing darkness we have to come to a halt before intellectual barriers we shall never cross.

Along with religious misinterpretations which baffle and lead us astray we have the most curious and sombre superstitions, old as the world itself and terrifying to listen to, as night descends. Beings that are half gods, half ghosts, haunt the darkness; at the crossways in the woods stand ancient idols to which strange powers are attributed, whilst there are miraculous stones in the depths of the forests. . . .

To gain even an approximate idea of the beliefs of these women with their little slanting eyes, all I have just said must be blended and jumbled together, and then an attempt made to introduce it into flighty little brains which mostly reject with a laugh the very thought of death and sometimes seem as frivolous and giddy as a bird.

And yet they are attentive and unremitting in their pilgrimages — a never ending series — and in their presence at all the temple ceremonies and festivals.

During the fine season, two or three times each month, they betake themselves in smiling groups

to pagodas delightfully situated out in the country. They assemble from every part of the country, filling the tiny roads and bridges with an endless procession of azure blue dresses and massive *chignons* of jet-black hair.

In the large towns during the summer, there is a pilgrimage to one sanctuary or another almost every evening, — sometimes in honour of a god so ancient that no one has any exact idea of the part he plays in the control or management of the world.

After work and business, dealing in curios and second-hand goods, when the numberless petty trades have ceased their monotonous activities and the myriads of little houses and shops are beginning to shut their doors, the women deck themselves out, adorn their hair with the most extravagant pins, and start off with large painted lanterns at the end of flexible staves, in their hands. The streets are thronged with these little persons, ladies or *mousmés*, proceeding slowly along, in sandals, and exchanging charming bows with one another. With a mighty waving of fans, the rustling of silk, and the prattle of

laughter, either at the fall of day, in the moonlight, or when the stars are shining overhead, they mount to the pagoda, — where gigantic gods await them, with horrible-looking masks, half hidden behind golden gates, in all the wonderful and incredible magnificence of the sanctuaries. They fling coins to the priests, throw themselves on to the ground in prayer, the while beating together their hands with sharp little taps — clack, clack — as though their fingers were made of wood. Above everything they prattle away, turn round, think of other things, and do their best, by means of laughter, to destroy their terror of the supernatural. . . .

The peasant woman, winter and summer alike, wears a blue cotton dress. From a distance, she can scarcely be distinguished from her husband, who, like her, wears a *chignon* and a dress of the same colour. You may see her daily bending over her task in the tea fields or the liquid swamps of the rice plantations, wearing a coarse hat when the sun is blazing above; and when the cold bleak wind is blowing, with her head completely wrapped up in an

invariably blue and ugly muffler, showing nothing but her almond-shaped eyes. The droll little Japanese peasant woman, wherever you chance to find her, even out in the most abandoned parts of the country, is indisputably far more refined than our Western peasant; she has pretty hands and dainty feet; a mere trifle would effect a complete transformation and make of her a very presentable china vase or screen sort of lady, whilst as regards affected manners and mincing, simpering airs there would be very little for her to learn.

Almost invariably she cultivates a pretty little garden close to her old wooden cottage, the interior of which, covered with white mats, is scrupulously clean. Her kitchen utensils, her tiny cups and pots and plates, instead of being, as is the case in France, of thick earthenware painted over with glaring flowers, are of transparent china adorned with those dainty, fine pictures which, in themselves alone, testify to a long heredity in art. There is originality in her manner of decking out her modest ancestral altar, and she can arrange in vases, with a hand-

ful of leaves and flowers, dainty and graceful bouquets such as the most artistic of our own women would scarcely be capable of putting together.

Perhaps she is more honest and of stricter morality — from the European standpoint — than her sister in the town; certainly she is more reserved towards strangers and more timorous, whilst deep in her nature there is considerable mistrust of, and hostility against, these intruders, in spite of her smiling, amiable welcome.

In the villages in the interior of Japan, far from the recent railroads and all the imports of modern civilization, where the age-long immobility of the country has not been disturbed, the peasant woman must be very slightly different from what, centuries ago, her most remote ancestor was, — that ancestor whose soul, dissipated by the flight of ages, has even ceased to hover above the family altar. In the so-called “barbarous” times of our Occidental history, when our remote ancestors had something of the savage and uncouth coarseness of

primitive life, there were doubtless in these Oriental islands of the ancient world the same pretty little mincing peasant women, the same little ladies of the towns, highly civilized, and bowing to one another in the same adorable fashion. . . .

To sum up, the reason that Japanese women of every rank in society are affected and finical in mind and body, artificial and prim; the reason their very soul seems rather old and worn out, so to speak, from the beginning of life, lies, it may be, in the fact that their race has, for so many centuries, been separated from the other varieties of the human species, living on its own stock and never being renovated. It would be unjust to bear them a grudge on that account, or because of the ugliness of their organs of vision; on the contrary, we must be pleased with them for showing themselves so amiable, graceful, and gay; for having made of Japan the country of the funniest and most ingenious little things, — the land of pretty manners and of laughter. . . .

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